

"Where in the World is the Gate of Heaven?"
Genesis 28:10-17

Our Redeemer Lutheran Church
Emmett, Idaho

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Grace, mercy and peace to you in the Name of the Lord God - the Father and the Son and the Holy Ghost. Amen.

Dear Baptized,

Given the Promise of the Redeemer and covered with the skins of animals whose innocent blood was shed on their behalf, Adam and Eve were driven from the paradisaical garden, through Eden's Gate and into this fallen world. The Lord God drove out the man; and He placed cherubim at the east of the Garden of Eden, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to guard the way to the Tree of Life (Genesis 3:24).

The search for the Eden's gate and garden have occupied the dreams and pilgrimages of mankind throughout the ages. Where is the way to Paradise? Where is the gate of heaven? One of the earliest records of the chronicles of the generations of man describes a people assembled on the Shinar plain who built a tower called a ziggurat. Come, let us build ourselves a city, and a tower whose top is in the heavens; let us make a name for ourselves (Genesis 11:4). But the gate of heaven is neither built on nor accessed by the works of man. Such intense designs and earnest exertions are nothing but the Babblings of those who sit in the kingdom of darkness. From the time of the Tower of Babel to this day, nothing has changed as people search for the Gate of Heaven. In March, 1997 thirty-nine members of a cult named Heaven's Gate committed suicide in California as they sought to beam up to a UFO purported to be hiding behind a comet. It was claimed that this space craft would take them into heaven.

Where in the world is the Gate of Heaven? You might think that no one knows the answer to that question, but the truth is that our Old Testament Reading actually gives it. Please listen to that reading once more as we hear the answer to the question ...

... Where in the Word is the Gate of Heaven?

Jacob left Beersheba, and went toward Haran. And he came to a certain place, and stayed there that night, because the sun had set. Taking one of the stones of the place, he put it under his head and lay down in that place to sleep. And he dreamed that there was a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven; and behold, the angels of God were ascending and descending on it! And behold, the LORD stood above it and said, "I am the LORD, the God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac; the land on which you lie I will give to you and to your descendants; and your

descendants shall be like the dust of the earth, and you shall spread abroad to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south; and by you and your descendants shall all the families of the earth bless themselves. Behold, I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land; for I will not leave you until I have done that of which I have spoken to you." Then Jacob awoke from his sleep and said, "Surely the LORD is in this place; and I did not know it." And he was afraid, and said, "How awesome is this place! This is none other than the House of God, and this is the Gate of Heaven."

Thus far the Word of the Lord our God.

Dearly beloved, here in this Word inspired by the Holy Spirit and written by the hand of Moses, you have the answer to the question of the ages, Where in the World is the Gate of Heaven? Jacob, the son of Isaac and grandson of Father Abraham, receives the answer and declares that the Gate of Heaven is the House of God. How awesome is this place! This is none other than the House of God, and this is the Gate of Heaven. The Gate to Heaven is located in the House of God and Jacob is blessed to be in this House and at this Gate.

Jacob is sent out from his country, his family and his father's house to go to the land out of which Abram had been called many years earlier. Jacob was a sinful man by nature who was no different than any of us and who, like you, in thought, in word and indeed, transgressed the Law of God that has been inscribed on the stony heart of man by the finger of God's creative hand. This second son of Isaac and Rebekah had deceived his father and this younger brother of Esau had gotten the eldest son's birthright and blessing. Jacob deserved to be driven out from the promised land. Added to the family atmosphere of suspicion, deceit, mistrust and revengeful anger, there was the ever present possibility that Jacob might take a wife who was not one of the chosen people of God. The father sends his son and Jacob left Beersheba, and went toward Haran.

The secluded walk on this dust-laden earth of death accompanied only one's sins, a troubled conscience and the accusations of the evil one is a pilgrimage to the pit. Nighttime and the darkness of this world heighten transgressions, thoughts and indictments. Jacob came to a certain place, and stayed there that night, because the sun had set. Taking one of the stones of the place, he put it under his head and lay down in that place to sleep. The place was no different than the place he passed a quarter mile back or would have come to a quarter mile ahead. In what one might term the ritual rehearsal for death, Jacob finds a stone for a pillow, lays his earthen clay upon the ground and retires only covered by the clothes on his back, which might well be, as far as he knows, his burial shroud. Above him and far beyond him are the heavenly stars. Man is here and in the night, the Gate to Heaven seems even farther away, even beyond the stars.

And he dreamed that there was a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven; and behold, the angels of God were ascending and descending on it! And behold, the LORD stood above it and said, "I am the LORD, the God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac; the land on which you lie I will give to you and to your descendants; and your descendants shall be like the dust of the earth, and you shall spread abroad to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south; and by you and your descendants shall all the families of the earth bless themselves. Behold, I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land; for I will not leave you until I have done that of which I have spoken to you." Then Jacob awoke from his sleep and said, "Surely the LORD is in this place; and I did not know it." And he was afraid, and said, "How awesome is this place! This is none other than the House of God, and this is the Gate of

Heaven."

The House of God is the Gate of Heaven. The specifications for this House of God are not given in terms of dimensions, location, style, size or architecture. What makes a place the House of God is wherever the Lord God is graciously present and the direction is from heaven above to this earth. That is one of the characteristics of the House of God. The House of God is the Gate of Heaven when the Lord God is graciously present for the benefit and blessing of His people. The presence of the Lord is wherever His Word of Promise is proclaimed ... first to Adam and Eve in the Garden with the promise of the Seed of the woman as the Savior, repeated to the early church fathers like Enoch, Noah and Abraham, and declared to Jacob in our sermon text.

In this Word made flesh is the proclamation that is the Gate of Heaven. You see, it is not Jacob's Ladder and we are not climbing higher, higher. It is Jehovah's Ladder and He descended lower and lower. He starts at the top in Heaven with the angels ascending and descending, and because we could not come to Him, He has come to us. On Jesus' Ladder He comes down to us and we hear the Word made flesh and dwelling among us (John 1:14) and Truly I say to you, hereafter you shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man (John 1:51). Jehovah's presence among us is Incarnational and that is what we confess ... He was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead and buried. The Son of God came down from heaven to do His Father's will ... to fulfill the Law in your place, to atone for the sins of the world and to die in your place. He left the Holy City and that He might sanctify the people with His own Blood, He suffered outside the gate (Hebrews 13:). They laid His lifeless clay in a newly hewn tomb and covered Him in the burial shroud.

The House of God is the place where the Lord is present ... indeed where His Word is proclaimed in its truth and purity. The Lord is present with His people and a woman asks the Incarnate Son of God, Are You greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well, and drank from it himself? (John 4:12) and she hears the Word, The water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life (John 4:14). This is the Manna from above as He proclaims to the people who ate in His presence, The Bread of God is He Who comes down from heaven and gives Life to the world (John 6:33). Dearly beloved of God, here is Jesus the Good Wine Whose presence at the Wedding in Cana was a prelude to His Holy Supper and the on-going Feast of the Bride and the Bridegroom that extends into and for eternity. The House of God is the place where the Lord is present ... indeed where His Sacraments of Baptism are administered as Jesus the Christ instituted them.

Do you understand where we're at here? I mean, not only here in this sermon, but especially here in this place? This is the House of God and He is present here for you and me ... graciously and mercifully present for our good. This is the Divine Service and here it is that the Divine is present with His people and bestows the blessings that only He is able to grant. This House of God is no different than the place when Adam and Eve became grandparents at the birth of Enosh and men began to call on the Name of the Lord (Genesis 4:26), and He has promised that where two or three are gathered together in My Name, there I am in the midst of them (Matthew 18:20). This House of God is no different than the upper room where the Passover Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world was present with His disciples on the night when He was betrayed and served told them to partake of the New Passover by eating His Body and drinking His Blood. This very room is the House of God and it is no different than the room where the disciples were assembled on Easter and

...

... Jesus came and stood in the midst, and said to them, 'Peace be with you.' Now when He had said this, He showed them His hands and His side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. Then Jesus said to them again, 'Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, even so I now send you.' And when He had said this, He breathed on them, and said to them, 'Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained' (John 20:19-23). Here are the Words of Institution for the Office of the Public Ministry of the Word and the authority for announcing the forgiving and the retaining of sins, in particular the basis for the absolution that is to be declared in the House of God as you have heard in the Gospel-laced historic liturgy of Christendom. Right here is the Gate of Heaven.

The House of God is the Gate of Heaven and two more points need to be considered. A Gate works in two directions. The Gate OF Heaven is the Gate FROM Heaven and it is only here, in the House of God where the Lord has promised to manifest Himself in His grace and mercy, and to shower His people with the forgiveness of sins, and to sprinkle His Blood upon the people. Or, as Our Redeemer and I have unconditionally subscribed, ...

The Office of the Keys is the peculiar church power which Christ has given to His Church on earth to forgive the sins of penitent sinners, but to retain the sins of the impenitent as long as they do not repent. ... that, when the called ministers of Christ deal with us by His divine command, especially when they exclude manifest and impenitent sinners from the Christian congregation, and, again, when they absolve those who repent of their sins and are willing to amend, this is as valid and certain, in heaven also, as if Christ, our dear Lord, dealt with us Himself (Small Catechism).

The Gate OF Heaven is the Gate TO Heaven and it is only here, in the House of God where there is the promise of forgiveness of sins, salvation and eternal life. Or, as all members of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod have unconditionally subscribed, ...

God has a unique community in the world. It is the mother that begets and bears every Christian through the Word of God. ... Therefore everything in the Christian church is so ordered that we may daily obtain full forgiveness of sins through the Word and through signs [the Sacraments] appointed to comfort and revive our consciences as long as we live. Although we have sin, the Holy Spirit sees to it that it does not harm us because we are in the Christian church, where there is full forgiveness of sin. God forgives us, and we forgive, bear with, and aid one another. But outside the Christian Church (that is, where the Gospel is not) there is no forgiveness, and hence no holiness. Therefore, all who seek to merit holiness through their works rather than through the Gospel and the forgiveness of sin have expelled and separated themselves from the church (Large Catechism). There is no salvation outside the Church.

Where in the World is the Gate of Heaven? Right here, in this House of God, dear people, is the Gate of Heaven. Immanuel is God with us and He is present here with us for our good. We are privileged to be invited into His presence ... to lift up the Cup of Salvation and call on the Name of the Lord (Psalm 116:13). Perhaps your reaction is the same as Jacob's who awoke from his sleep and said, 'Surely the LORD is in this place; and I did not know it.' And he was afraid, and said, 'How awesome is this place! This is none other than the House of God, and this is the Gate of Heaven.'" Amen.