**Surely The Lord Is In This Place**

**Genesis 28:10-17**

19th Sunday after Trinity

10.10.2021

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Last week we addressed the question, “What does the Lord your God require of you?” In short, we are to live our lives in accordance with His Word and will – all of it – not just that which agrees with us. And thankfully, in Christ Jesus, we are forgiven for our failures to do so, the debt of our sinfulness is paid if full on the cross and delivered to us today in Word and Sacrament.

Today I’d like to address another question at the beginning of this sermon, what do you expect from God? I ask that in all seriousness, what do you expect from God? We do have certain expectations of God. Unfortunately, many people think that it appears that God does not meet our expectations of Him.

In the Gospel lesson, a paralytic was brought to Jesus – a man who was unable to move because of a physical affliction which had left him paralyzed. What did these friends, and that paralyzed man, expect of Jesus? We all read this text and think the answer should be obvious. Jesus had done numerous miraculous healings, so why else friends bring a paralyzed man to Jesus? Obviously, to have Jesus heal him. But Jesus does what? He says, “Take heart, my son; your sins are forgiven.”

Yes, Jesus does heal the paralytic so that he picks up his bed and goes home, but Jesus did the most important thing first – He forgave the man’s sins.

Let’s get back to the question, “What do you expect from God?” This is not an off-the-cuff question. Nor should you be thinking, “OK, what answer does pastor want me to give.” There is no right or wrong answer. This question does have either an honest or dishonest answer. In our text God presents himself in a way that doesn't fit the real expectations of most people, not even of most Christians.

What do you expect from God? Yeah, we all know the simple theology that God is a gracious and merciful God. We know what the answer should be, that He will bless us and keep us with his good, kind, loving, generosity.

But, our theology and are beliefs come to a screeching halt because we also know life in the world. At this point in history, COVID cases are rising. Even without that virus, beloved friends and family members have died. Severe or debilitating illness have invaded our lives or the lives of loved ones. We know what our sinfulness deserves from the hand of God. AND… we expect those things that are warped because of sin in the world – hardship and tribulation.

Most people do not always expect such things. Most people are fairly optimistic, expecting to be healthy, happy, and successful. That expectation, however, is not necessarily connected to our faith in God. Our Creator God is so faithful and good that we consistently experience His blessings naturally. Faith fails though, and we join the false religion of the world and attribute earthly blessings to “Mother Nature.”

Our flesh and the world’s commentary on life dictate more of our attitude about such things than does our faith in God. We are after all human beings. Our world tells us to “be who we are.” Our authentic self is simply a matter of our deepest desires. Many people believe they are something special, they deserve to go from one good thing to another.

As you can see, in such cases God has been removed from that picture, it is all about the individual and their desires. When some calamity strikes the lives of such people, they cannot understand what is going on, or why it is happening. They think “a loving god would never let such things happen to good people? Would He?” And so, sometimes faith flees.

Jacob may have felt that way about life. His father was rich, and life was about as good as it could get. He probably expected that to continue. Jacob’s family had servants. He wore nice clothing, and sat down daily to a table bountiful with fine food. I doubt he thought life would be any different.

Jacob listened to his mother, lied to his father, stole his brother’s birthright and blessing, and was forced to flee – oh, how life had changed. Our text finds Jacob running away from his brother’s wrath, trying to find his mother's brother. No longer would he be the loved son of a rich man. He was going to be the uninvited nephew of a man who was not very honest, nor was he nice. Jacob would be nothing more than a hired hand, more like an indentured servant.

With the things he’d done, he probably did not expect to be dealt a very good hand. His sin was evident. He was probably sure that he had done nothing for which God should pleased with him – but plenty for which he should have been punished by God.

Dear friends, not everyone expects life to be good. Some people are born into troubles. Maybe born with physical disabilities. Others born into a home with abusive parents. Some born into poverty. These folks do not have high hopes for a great life.

But even with issues, most people dream that it can get better. And when it does, they are going to have it made.

Everybody knows the saying, “Into every life the rain must fall.” Eventually, hardship, illness, tribulation, or sorrow finds our door. We discover the pain of life. Such things challenge us and our faith. Sometimes such things pervert our idea of what life is supposed to be – or going to be.

At our lowest, when life kicks us in the teeth, faith may falter, and we may begin to expect God to be less than kind and generous. At that point, with a fatalistic attitude, we may greet bad news with, “What did you expect? Life sucks and then you die!”

We expect sickness. Maybe life takes a sharp turn and one problem after another crops up – unexpected bills that are larger than we think we can handle, a couple deaths of friends and family members. There is always something. Satan is a wily foe and he always knows where each of our hearts are. He knows how to hurt us the most.

That is why we may even begin to expect problems. Some move to unbelief, that there is no God and life is pointless.

Others know their sins and figure God has to have a hand in their tribulations, in fact, He is the author, punishing us because of something we must have done. Some have guilt because their sins are well-hidden. But then they remember that God knows what nobody else does. Of course, our shame is there because we know the truth. We know what we deserve from God.

Jacob grabs a stone for a pillow. He knows what he deserves from God. God should lower the boom. God should come to him.

And God does. There is no boom. There is no punishment. There is no wrath of God. God knew of Jacob’s sorrow over his sin, his repentance in his heart.

God speaks to him in his dream, He makes a promise to him. God promises that He is and will be with Jacob. It is as if God said to Him, “Take heart, my son; your sins are forgiven.” It is the Word of God who speaks in the dream, that is, it is the pre-incarnate Christ. Speaking to Jacob is the one who will take on human flesh, live a life of perfection, and then sacrifice that life to pay for all sin – including Jacob’s. Jacob’s life after this visitation from God was not easy. It was not perfect. It was however, blessed, for God promised to be and was always with him.

Jacob awoke, “Surely the Lord is in this place, and I did not know it.” 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.”

There is the very same promise you and I have from God in Christ Jesus. No, you may not have had a dream where Christ spoke to you personally to tells you such a thing. Of course, you may like that to happen.

You do have something more sure, though. You know what the Word of God made human flesh endured. Christ endured the sorrows and tribulations of life in human flesh, stuck in a sinful world. Pain, sorrow, suffering, and death were all around Him.

He had friends die. He knew betrayal at the hands of a friend. He was hated and despised. He was beaten and abused, and then nailed to the cross. God enfleshed, the incarnate Word, suffered to atone for your sins and mine. He died that we might never die, having the hope of everlasting life. He has defeated all that brings pain and suffering to us in this world – sin, death, and Satan. His resurrection three days later proclaims the victory complete and His promises true.

What do you expect from God? Have your expectations sunk to such a depth that you expect nothing? Has Satan’s machinations in the world, and specifically in your life, so jaded you that you fail to see clearly?

Surely the Lord is in this place! He has spoken to you, “Take heart, my son; your sins are forgiven.”

Surely the Lord is in this place! He gives you His holy body to eat and His sacred blood to drink. He fills you with Himself and raises you to new life.

Surely the Lord is in this place! He speaks to you words of promise and hope. He blesses you when His servant speaks and puts His name upon you. He promises to be with you always, to the very end of the age.

Dearly beloved of God, in this very place, you may always find Him. Here He always comes to bring you forgiveness, peace, and life. And from here He sends you back into the fallen creation – but He does so only after He has fed you, nourished you, and strengthened you by joining Himself to you. In Him you live, and move, and have your being. Amen.