

The House of God

[Genesis 28:10-19a](#)

[Psalms 139: 1-11, 22-23](#)

[Romans 8:12-25](#)

[Matthew 13:24-30,36-43](#)

Lately I have found myself in a lot of airports. I don't know about you, but I have a tumultuous relationship with airports. Aside from all the challenges of navigating through security and traversing complex spaces, there is an undeniably emotional component to airports. I've never used air travel for work, so they have never been mundane to me. I am either feeling super excited about where I'm headed, or I am fighting tears after leaving behind a spectacular holiday or saying goodbye to a face that I'm literally tearing myself away from. Airports are liminal spaces. They are designed for passing through, not remaining in. Airports are the places between what was and what comes next. They are thresholds. Psychologically speaking, liminal spaces exist for all of us. They occur whenever we switch careers or move, experience bodily transitions, have changes in our families or the grief of loss. They indicate alterations in circumstances or even our identity. Life forces us into changes of all kinds. We all know what it feels like to stand at a threshold and walk through it. The tricky part is the in-between time, when one thing has ended and the next has yet to begin. Gratefully, our Biblical authors were well acquainted with liminal spaces. In fact, it is most often in liminal moments when God is revealed.

This morning we encounter Jacob in the hill country of central Canaan, about three days into a month-long journey. After stealing his brother's birthright, his mom heard Esau was planning murderous retaliation. Rebekah convinced her husband Isaac to send Jacob away on the pretense of finding him a wife, but he was running for his life. It is important to remember that Jacob is Abraham's heir, and he will inherit enormous wealth, property, and the covenant itself. But he must live to claim it. In this moment, he is a refugee, leaving his homeland, his family, and his security for an unclear amount of time. He didn't know it yet, but he would never see his beloved mother again. He left so quickly, and had so little, that

he had to use a rock as a pillow. This journey was a liminal time for Jacob. It was an intermediate location between two lives. It is here, at the beginning of his journey, when his feet are not yet hardened from walking and his heart is still freshly grieving the loss of the familiar that God appears.

In his vision, Jacob sees a ladder connecting Heaven and earth. Then God appears and speaks words of comfort to him, assuring him that Abraham's covenant will indeed continue through him, and that his future is guaranteed. Remember, Jacob was leaving the land of promise. He was headed into territory he had never been, among people who did not love or worship Abraham's God. It is reasonable for him to question if God's presence extended beyond the boundary lines of his homeland, if God could or would follow him into that frontier. In his dream, the angels were traversing the ladder that connected the visible world with the invisible one. It's as if God wanted him to recognize that divine work is already taking place through the ministration of angels, even in this foreign place. Heaven and Earth are always interacting, even in places we've never been, even in ways we've never imagined. And God's words to Jacob confirmed God's protection over him regardless of where he traveled.

When Jacob named that place Bethel, he called it The House of God. The beautiful, ironic, thing about that name is God's first named house has no walls, no ceiling, no carpet, and no altar. God's first house proves God's own homelessness. Jacob names the location Bethel, The House of God, not because that was the place God's location was fixed, but because that is the place that would forever signal to every new generation that God exists everywhere. We may feel groundless, in uncharted territory, where threats loom on every side, and yet... God is already here.

David wrote this same sentiment in poetry thousands of years later. "Where can I go from your spirit, where can I flee from your presence?" He lists the furthest places he can imagine, the scariest, even the darkness, and God is always going before him, holding him

from behind and in front, knowing him in the places and ways he did not yet even know himself. David wrote this because he had experienced it. He had seen the curtain pulled back. Like Jacob, his life illustrated the hand of God at work in the liminal places of his own life and then he recounted it for us. This is one of the most powerful Psalms we recite and in it we remember that there is no place we can go where God did not go first, where the angels are not already at work.

We are grateful for these reminders. But if we're honest, it can be difficult to hold onto them when we find ourselves in the uncomfortable transitional spaces of life. When we're waiting for a diagnosis, or enduring the long process of healing, when we've lost a loved one, when what we've known is passed, but we can't yet see or move into what comes next. We are not good with waiting, with uncertainty, especially when it's uncomfortable. Sometimes the liminal spaces that are the hardest aren't even our own, but the ones we endure accompanying others. We're willing to plunge into cold water, to swallow the yucky medicine, to do just about anything as long as it can be fast and we can move on. But transitions tend to challenge our endurance.

Today's parable is an excellent example. This week we see a Sower throwing good seed into a good field and the soil is producing well. Unfortunately, his enemy tossed a bunch of weed seeds in the field. The servants knew that the weeds would steal some of the nutrition and harvestable crop space from the wheat, so they wanted to get rid of it immediately. But the Sower understood that to uproot the weeds would uproot some of the wheat at the same time. The servants were right to be concerned; it was a legitimate problem. But the Sower was less worried about the imposing weeds than about the health of the wheat. We want to rush to fix things to point fingers, eliminate problems, and move forward with clarity, purpose, and direction. But God is not impatient like us. God sees behind the curtain that shrouds our view, and gently leads us through the waiting, knowing one day we too will see and understand.

Paul talks about this in a way that likens our experience to Jacob's. Like Jacob, we are heirs of God's promise and our future is secure. But, like Jacob, we often find ourselves in uncomfortable places, leaving behind people and comforts we never wanted to say goodbye to, unsure about what comes next, feeling chained by circumstances that feel overpowering. Paul says that even the creation itself, the smoky air and parched ground, feels the weight and pain of this interminable decay and groan in response. Rather than panicking or falling into despair, Paul encourages us to imagine these uncomfortable periods of waiting as labor pains. Like a laboring woman, Paul tells us to cling to our hope because there will come an end. Christ's glory will be ours in the resurrection. What has been hidden, will be revealed. Paul calls us to a powerful form of patience, a steadfast endurance that carries the ability to withstand the waiting and the unknown while holding tightly to our identity as children of God.

The interesting thing about being someone's successor, their heir or beneficiary, is that it is not immediately obvious. Unless you tell people or wear it emblazoned on your t-shirt, people don't immediately know. Jesus promises that the righteous will shine the like sun in the kingdom of their father. Paul says that one day the children of God will be revealed. Until that day, not everyone will immediately recognize what is true about us and sometimes we walk through excruciating circumstances that shroud the truth of our identity. But, as Christians, we are sacramental people. We are Bethel, The House of God, and everywhere we go, even in the liminal spaces, we are the location where heaven meets earth. As we remember that God has gone before us, and the angels are active even in the darkness, we live the truth of that with hope and resilience. When we face uncertainty without losing our confidence, when we can smile and love even through tears, we help pull back the curtain to reveal what will eventually be obvious to the world. As we approach the altar today, we are joining the worship of heaven. The angels have been at work here long before us. God is always going before us. And as we leave from this place, we take the resurrection hope in us out into transitional spaces. May we be a

people confident in God's presence, living the truth of that presence even through liminal times, and may we always remember that wherever we go, we are the House of God.