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Given at St. Mark's Church, Bridgewater, CT

Gen 28:10-19a/ Psalm 139:1-11, 22-23/ Rom 8:12-25/ Matt 13: 24-30, 36-43

“Surely God is in this place— and I did not know it!” †

This week's scripture lessons bring to mind questions of God's movement in the world: **Where, When, and How?** How we, as children of God, come into contact with our Creator, emphasizing the difference between our *perception* and God's *reality*, and the difference between our concepts of place, time, and action, and “God's Place,” God's Time,” and God's movement among us —**where, when, and how.**

First, let's consider **Where, “God's Place”** — In the OT passage from Genesis, notice that the word “place” is mentioned at least 5 times. The Hebrew word used here (מָגוֹם - *magom*) translates literally as “place of standing.” During patriarchal times and the period the OT is describing, standing was the usual position one assumed when praying to God (as opposed to kneeling), it was considered the most respectful posture taken in prayer. So early in this story, we who are listening to it, assume that this “place” is a place of prayer, a place of God. And yet, Jacob does not seem to know this... it is not clear to him until God is made manifest to him. God comes in a dream, the dream of “Jacob's Ladder”— the top representing heaven (the dwelling place of God) and the bottom earth (the realm of human existence), the ladder provides a way for each side to approach the other. When this occurs, Jacob feels God's real presence there in that very place where he was sleeping... “Surely the LORD is in this place, and I did not know it!” He awakens from his “dream” with new knowledge, knowing of the presence of God. He expresses awe at how this seemingly ordinary place is now consumed by God... and he names it “Beth- El,” the “House of God.” Next, consider **When, or “God's Time”** — It is remarkable that God is made manifest when Jacob least expected it. Jacob is alone, fleeing his brother's hatred and threats, and is very frightened and unsure of himself. One could say that he was “having a bad day” and the future didn't seem bright. Yet, at that precise moment of despair and deep vulnerability, God appears to him, to confirm that he will carry on the promise made to his ancestors. Note that the time (as with the place) is God's choice, not Jacob's—God comes to us, visits us when God chooses and often at times we don't expect.

In Greek, there are several words that can be used to express the English word “time,” two of them, *Chronos* (“Our Time” or linear time) and *Kairos* (“God's Time”), are helpful to consider. *Chronos*, our time, what we are used to... is linear, has a distinct beginning and end, is measurable and temporal; but *kairos*, God's time, comes “from above,” it is not easy to measure, it is infinite, eternal, without beginning or end... it's a time of heightened opportunity and vulnerability (our word *crisis* is related to this word *kairos*).

In this Genesis story, we can envision God's time meeting our time (*chronos* becomes *kairos*). God touches humankind during this experience, this dream event Jacob has had. God uses such moments in time as a vehicle for getting through to us. The story highlights the fact that God chooses to find us, often when we least expect it! Though God is everywhere, God is especially present to us in "great moments" of *kairos*. Sometimes these moments are profound and clearly felt, often they are barely noticeable.

This leads us finally to reflect on **How or "God's Action"** — We know, as Episcopalians, that God is always with us, as promised to Abraham and Jacob, though at times we don't feel it. In the course of our lives, sometimes it's hard for us to believe that God is really present. Often God comes to us, as God did to Jacob, unconsciously. It may be in a church, or more likely in our workplace or at home, often when we are stressed or feeling lonely and abandoned, but God comes, if only to identify with our suffering, to be present during our struggles, our pain. And quite often, God comes to us in the form of someone in need, living under an overpass, or in their car, or as a stranger in the market; sometimes we sense this presence, sometimes we don't, often we are only aware of it much later, like Jacob.

Just as it's impossible to prove empirically that God exists, it's impossible to explain how God moves. Our Christian faith tells us that God comes to us in special moments when *kairos* meets *chronos*, known as the sacraments. God comes to us in the Eucharist; God becomes present here among us in the present.... In that moment, by grace of God, we experience *kairos*, "God's time," which is pregnant with potential, vulnerability, and opportunity. During sacramental moments (like Eucharist, Baptism, confirmation, marriage, funerals, ordinations, etc...) God comes to us and we are brought to God. It is comforting to know that at times of stress, insecurity, and great vulnerability, we have places of worship (our own "Beth-El") and times (such as our Eucharist together) when we are assured of God's presence. This is important to us, as mortal beings who are stuck in linear time and temporal space, because time and place help shape us.

And, we must accept that God's presence is not finite, not limited to the sanctuary or church building, nor limited by our own desires to know or our inabilities to perceive God. In the OT stories we've heard and will continue to hear over the coming weeks, place and time never become a final objective... they only provide sustenance for the ongoing journey. So too, our experience of God, those moments of *kairos*, whether obvious or unnoticed, sustain us to be able to move on in this world.

And with this in mind, today's Gospel helps us to see that "our time" is not always "God's time" and that "God's ways" are not always "our ways." This farming parable, different from last week's about the "soil," today is about "the seed," asking if we are "good seed" or "bad seed," holy or evil.

Notice how the story and its explanation convey the reality that good and evil exist together... the wheat and the weeds grow together. The world, our community, the family

into which we were born, even our Church, is not perfect or entirely trustworthy. In this world, there are places of conflict, cruelty, and pain. We need only turn on the news to see it! But the master's insistence is that the servants not go into the field and try to weed it out... for they would never be able to get rid of all the weeds and that pulling at them can often do more harm than good. It's God's role to take care of evil!

We live in an imperfect world, and no human effort can change that fact! The goal is to live as faithfully as possible, until that "final harvest" ... To live patiently in the presence of wickedness and misfortune. In the process, we must remember that whenever we pray together (whether online or in person) when we celebrate our sacramental life together, God comes and we are caught up in "God's time" and "God's place"—a taste of what is to come in the end, at the harvest. Let's remember as we come to the altar today and when we enter back into the world tomorrow.... God is present with us (*kairos* touches *chronos*), at times and places we expect, and at times and places we least expect. And, we are called to bring that presence of God to all those we encounter. †