

Zeisset Reunion Memorial Service Sunday, August 3, 2014

Genesis 28:10-17 excerpts (NRSV)

Jacob came to a certain place and stayed there. ... Taking one of the stones of the place, he put it under his head and lay down in that place. And he dreamed that there was a ladder set up on the earth, the top of it reaching to heaven; and the angels of God were ascending and descending on it. And the Lord stood beside him and said, “I am the Lord, the God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac. ... Know that I am with you and will keep you wherever you go. ... Then Jacob woke 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.”

Jacob was in a place that he recognized as a sacred place. What makes a place sacred?

One thing that made a place sacred for Jacob was the memory of his ancestors. He remembered Abraham and Isaac.

We stand in a place today that helps us remember our ancestors. We remember parents and grandparents and great-grandparents. We remember Abraham and Elizabeth Landes Zeisset, Jakob and Magdalena Plaetscher Zeisset, Johannes and Christina Baer Zeisset, Jakob and Johanna Epp Zeisset, Jakob Friedrich and Margarethe Mueller Zeisset. We remember Louise and Bertha and Lizzie and Jacob and Bettie and Henry Zeisset.

Not all of our ancestors are buried in this place, just as Jacob’s ancestors were not buried in the place where he was. But this place keeps the memory of our ancestors—those buried here and those buried in other places in America and in Germany. That makes this place important and sacred.

My own ancestry is traced through Germans from Russia. When most came to America in the 1870s, one branch remained in Russia. A part of that branch came to Canada in the 1920s. In recent years descendants of that branch visited Russia searching for places associated with their ancestry, but the villages and cemeteries were obliterated. However, we discovered that my forgotten great-great-grandmother had come to Kansas. She was the 3- and even 4-greats grandmother to the Canadians. By now many of them have made a pilgrimage to her grave in central Kansas, a sacred place that holds the memory of all the ancestors— those who came to the United States and Canada and those who remained in Russia, those known and those unknown.

A place that helps us remember our ancestors is sacred. This sacred place helps us remember that the memory of the Zeisset ancestors binds us together as family. This sacred place helps us remember that the Lord who was with Jacob and with our ancestors is with us and with our descendants. In this sacred place we give thanks for the memory of our ancestors, for our descendants, for family, for the presence of the Lord. Thanks be to God.