

Ps 139; Gen 28:10-19a;
Ro 8:12-25; Mt 13:24-30, 36-43

Bethel – The House of God

Being born into Christ is a breakthrough. Old ways no longer fill our needs: for meaning – for purpose – for fellowship – for belonging. Maybe the God of Love reached you through a loved one, a friend, a film, a poem or a song. When that happens, the old pattern is broken, but we have not found the new one yet.

John Wesley describes this as receiving an invitation to God's house. Maybe we're unsure. Perhaps a decision is so hard to make that we don't even RSVP. Then, one day, we find ourselves on the doorstep of the house – God's house. We just stand on the porch. We're pretty sure we are invited, but we have not answered the invitation. Wesley calls this the working of prevenient grace. The work of the Holy Spirit out in the world – wooing, illuminating, imparting the Love of God. The unbelieving heart just isn't sure. We say, "Did I hear that right? God loves me? Jesus loves me? Me?" Prevenient grace is the grace that goes before faith. We show up because we begin to believe that we are invited. We are invited to live – and not to die.

Some of us stand on the porch for years. When we open the door of the house, we are giving our personal "yes" to Jesus. When we respond to God's invitation, something is accomplished in our heart and mind – in our soul. God makes us right – justified – with His holy presence. Our sins are washed away. We walk in, believing. The faith is ours – the work in us is God's work. Only God justifies. At first, you may not notice any difference in yourself. Justification is Christ doing for us what we cannot do for ourselves.

Once inside God's house, there are many rooms to explore. Our guide inside is sanctifying grace. We are given help and support and encourage-ment to mature in faith and to live a holy life.

So, John Wesley thought of being born into Christ's kingdom – coming into God's family home as: the porch of prevenient grace, the door of justifying grace, and the many rooms of sanctifying grace.

Although Messiah was not yet in the world, the story of Jacob's many conflicts and trials is a journey to faith in the one true God. God is always at work. How many refuse see the mighty working of God in persons and events – large and small? When it comes to God's grace – Some say "luck" – some say "coincidence." Some say it was nothing. Amazing!

In the spring of 1996, a veteran mountain climber, Brent Weathers, undertook his sixth major climb – to the summit of Mt. Everest. The team was at about 26,000 feet – very near the top. They heard what sounded like a freight train. It was a powerful hurricane (about 100 mph) like a hammer against their tents. Brent was outside when it hit. He was blinded in the white-out. His oxygen was depleted. He fell and couldn't get up. Dr. Ken Kamler tells the story: Those who could get out tried to rescue those who were down before they froze to death. Ken was the only doctor on the mountain that day. He moved down to Camp 2 a little lower on the mountain, to prepare to help the injured as they arrived. When two rescuers saw Brent in the snow, they found him paralyzed and unresponsive. They counted him as dead. They had to leave him to help others with some chance of living.

Brent spent two nights in the snow, with his face and hands exposed to the cold. He tells his story now in motivational speeches, and in his book, *Left for Dead*. Such exposure has always meant death. The rescuers reported to Dr. Kamler that Brent was dead.

Brent could see his wife and children in front of him. His compulsive adventure-seeking had become a problem in his marriage and in his family. Brent had taken on mountain climbing to battle serious depression, what he called "the black dog." As he lay there seeing his family, he realized it was a vision. He was not back in Texas, he was on Everest in 100 mph wind, and -100° F temperature. He smacked his right arm against the frozen snow and it sounded like a piece

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of fire wood. But he knew he had to get back to his family – that he had been selfish all for the sake of his climber's ego, and the fear of sinking again into depression. Those two nights there on Everest he knew he did not want to die. Beyond all odds, after being left for dead, he got up, made it to a tent to warm up a bit, then walked down to the medical tent on frozen feet.

When he walked in, Ken Kamler says Brent asked where he should sit, and whether Ken accepted his health insurance. He was air-lifted to the hospital. Brent lost his nose and parts of his cheeks, his right arm between the elbow and wrist – and all the fingers on his left hand. The doctors have rebuilt his nose and fashioned an appendage Brent calls his “mitt” for grasping. Brent and his wife are reunited and happier than they have ever been.

Brent's life was a train wreck when he returned to Everest to conquer the mountain. His wife was ready to leave him. His kids hardly knew him. He had been running in fear of the “black dog” of depression. As he lay paralyzed and dying, he said a big “yes” to life. Though the wind drowned out his efforts to be heard by his fellow climbers, God heard his cry. He opened the door and entered God's house.

“You didn't receive a spirit of slavery to lead you back again into fear, but you received a Spirit that shows you are adopted as His children. With this Spirit, we cry ‘Abba, Father.’ The same Spirit agrees with our spirit that we are God's children.” (Ro 8:15-16)

When Jacob lay down at Bethel, with his head on a stone, how long had he held the Creator God at arm's length? Brent Weathers had held out for forty-odd years, without making a move.

Have you been ignoring God's loving invitation to come into the house? The kingdom of God – God's big, big house is not seen with worldly eyes. The ministers of God's grace in Jesus Christ are moving about freely – on assignment – delivering this precious invitation. Amen.