

Marvelous Dream

Text: Genesis 28:10-19

Romans 8:12-25 (Series A, 7th Sunday after Pentecost) Ps. 139:1-12, 22-23

Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43

At sunset Jacob came to a holy place and camped there. He lay down to sleep, resting his head on a stone. He dreamed that he saw a stairway reaching from the earth to heaven, with angels going up and down on it. And there was the Lord standing beside him.

Prayer: Shine within our hearts, loving Master, the pure light of your divine knowledge and open the eyes of our minds that we may comprehend the message of your Word. Instill in us also reverence for your commandments, so that having conquered all sinful desires, we may pursue a spiritual life, thinking and doing all those things that are pleasing to You. For You, Christ our God, are the light of our souls and bodies, and to You we give glory together with your Father who is without beginning and your all holy, good, and life giving Spirit, now and forever and to the ages of ages. Amen.

Today we will do a bible study from the Genesis account about two brothers, one named Jacob and the other Esau. Jacob was a schemer. He wasn't happy that he was the younger of the two. It meant that his brother Esau would inherit everything from their father Isaac. With a bowl of stew he tricked poor dumb Esau into promising him to hand over his inheritance.

With his poor old father Isaac blind and on his deathbed, Jacob dressed up in Esau's clothes and put goats skin on his arms and neck and tricked his father into blessing Jacob and not his hairy-skinned brother. In this way he grabbed every cent of the inheritance that should have gone to Esau.

That's the way it was with Jacob. He liked nothing better than to trick his dumb brother. By hook or by crook he was going to get his own way and he did. Getting the blessing from father Isaac was really important to him. This blessing of Isaac meant that he was now head of the house.

Esau and all the other relatives would now be subject to him. In fact, from now on Esau will be Jacob's slave and Isaac didn't have to read the stars to see that there would be future trouble between the two brothers. It's no wonder that Esau promised, "After dad's funeral, I'm going to kill that little shyster." Said Esau.

Jacob knew that when his brother was angry there was no telling what he would do. Besides he was a strong outdoors kind of person and Jacob would be no match for him if it ever came to a fight. So he gets out of town, slipping out the back door. He's now a fugitive, an exile, taking with him only the things he could carry. He had wanted more than anything to inherit the old man's estate, to have it all, to be the head of the family and put his older brother in his place. Now look at him.

Out there in the middle of nowhere. Without family protection or support, a fugitive, banished, with only the shirt on his back. Alone, vulnerable, and in some deserted place, that's where we find Jacob in today's first reading from Genesis 28. Jacob, once the schemer, the grabber, so smart and cocky, is now defenseless, alone in the night, sleeping on the ground with a stone for his pillow.

Does Jacob toss and turn during the night because of the way he's tricked his father? Does he lie there unable to sleep because of the way he treated his brother? I don't think so. Jacob sleeps like a baby and has technicolour dreams.

A great stairway is thrown down from heaven right to where Jacob sleeps. *"And the angels of God were ascending and descending on it... . And there was the Lord standing beside him "* (28:1-2). And God makes a promise to Jacob. He repeats the promise made to his grandfather Abraham and his father Isaac.

He reminds him that he will have many descendants and will be given the land on which he was lying. And then God says to Jacob, *"Remember, I will be with you and protect you wherever you go, and I will bring you back to this land. I will not leave you until I have done all that I have promised you"* (Gen 28:15).

Just think about this. Here is the meanest, money-hungry, scheming low life sleeping on the ground in some unknown place because he is afraid of his own brother whom he swindled. God comes down and appears to him in a dream and tells him that he is blessed and that God would always be with him and protect him. That hardly seems right. And it definitely isn't fair.

But that's the way God is. He is gracious and merciful to the worst sinner. God doesn't abandon his people – even the worst of us, even the meanest and greediest amongst us. Just as God came to Jacob he comes down and assures us that he will never leave us, will always keep us and will always protect us.

Don't we see the same thing happening to the thief who was crucified along side of Jesus? We don't know a lot about him but we do know that he was a criminal. He had lived a life of crime and deserved the punishment that was being dealt out to him. And what does Jesus say to him, "*I promise you that today you will be in Paradise with me.*" Now that hardly seems fair.

Or what about Saul, the man who so enthusiastically went about getting rid of as many followers of Christ as he could? God came down and called him to be his messenger. He was baptized and became an apostle and took the good news of Jesus far and wide.

At our baptism God came down to us. We didn't do anything particular to warrant any favours from God. In fact, in baptism we did nothing to earn or deserve the promises that God made to us on that occasion.

It seems we should do something good first before we receive so much from him. But that's the way God is. He knows that we are caught in sin and like Jacob try to get away with as much as possible.

And in spite of everything he still loves us and sticks by the promise that he made to us at our baptism, "*I will be with and protect you wherever you go.*" He even sent us his Son to be our Saviour, to die in our place, to rise again and assure us that we have a place in heaven when we leave this life.

Because of our sin – our meanness, unkindness – God came down to us in his Son Jesus. That's what the Christmas story is all about and the events of Good Friday. Just as God came down to Jacob in the dream in spite of and because of his wickedness, Jesus came down for our sake.

He came down to reassure us of God's love, and to reaffirm that he will be with his people always. "Immanuel" that's what they called Jesus. "Immanuel" which means "God is with us."

- God is with us
- to help us in our sinfulness,
- to heal us of our diseases,
- to comfort us in our troubles,
- to reassure us of his presence when we are feeling unloved and unlovable,
- to forgive us for our evil and wrongdoing.

This morning as we receive Holy Communion again God is being typically God. We come here burdened with all kinds of personal issues. We are very much aware that we have said and done all kinds of things that have been so opposite to the way God wants us to live as his people.

We come here aware of the fact that we have hurt others, by what we say and do. We can be so much like Jacob and be mean, unfeeling and scheming to our families and friends. And yet God still comes down to us in this meal. We receive bread, the very body of Jesus, we drink the wine, the blood Jesus shed on the cross for us.

God comes down to us in this simple bread and wine, even though we don't deserve it and assures us that he still loves us, that we are forgiven, and that he will continue to protect us wherever we go until that day we take our last breath and enter the joy of eternal life in heaven.

I'm not even going to pretend that I understand the mysteries of Holy Communion. All I can say is that God in his grace, in his love comes down to us and reassures us that we are still his children even in the midst of covid-19 pandemic just as he reassured Jacob that he had not given up on him and would always be there for him. God hasn't forgotten us... Amen!

After waking up from that wonderful dream, the mean, greedy, scheming Jacob got up from his stone pillow and worshipped God with a thankful heart. He promised to give to the Lord a tenth of everything God gave him.

The heart of Jacob had been changed in this encounter with God. And like Jacob we get up from kneeling at the altar different people. In our regular Eucharistic service, when we leave the communion table *refreshed, renewed, reassured, thankful* and sent out into the church as his disciples and out into the world to make it a better place.

“We have met the enemy, and he /she is us”..... like Jacob by nature we are selfish and tight-fisted. But thank God for his generosity. Thank God for the generosity of his Son who went to the cross for us. Let us offer to God a prayer of thanks. God is good; God is always good and has given us everything.

Amen.

Make melodies in your heart with these hymns:

- Blest Be the Tie That Binds # 656
- Abide with Me # 629
- I Love to Tell the Story # 661

Happy birthday and Happy belated birthday to all individual celebrating days in July 2020

July 19, 2020