

Pastor T.C. Arnold
19th Sunday after Trinity
Genesis 28:10-17
October 6th, 2013

My name is Jacob. I'm the son of Isaac and the grandson of Abraham... whose story I am sure you know. I think you also might happen to know my story as well. I'm a twin... a "second" born twin... which means I did not inherit the birthright from my father. No, I got that in a different way. My brother Esau sold it to me. I was cooking stew and my brother came in from the field exhausted and famished. He said, "*Let me have some of that stew.*" I could see he was desperate. I told him I would give him some if he sold me his birthright. He was so tired and hungry that he did it. I said, "*Swear to me now.*" And he did. I gave him bread and stew. What a sucker he was. What a deceiver I am.

And I didn't stop there. With the help of my mother, Rebekah, who always liked me best, I was even able to receive my father's blessing not long before he died. That took some doing. Mom wanted me to have it so she was in on it too. Dad was sick and blind by that time in his life. He was ready to give Esau, the older twin, the blessing of headship so he sent him out to hunt for food and then he would bless him. While he was away, mom cooked up two good young goats, prepared them just the way dad likes. I even put on Esau's clothes and put the goat skin on my hands to smell and feel like my brother. Mom helped. Long story short, my father Isaac blessed me, Esau comes back and sees that he and dad have been tricked, Esau is angry (who could blame him) and dad says, I can't undo what I did and now the blessing belongs to Jacob. And oh ya... Jacob, you better get out of Dodge, marry a woman from our father Abraham's house and steer clear of your brother. He has in his heart to kill you.

I share these things about my family and me so that you know. I want to be honest with you... because I haven't always been honest. Look at us... I'm deceptive Jacob. Mother is scheming Rebekah. Father is unwitting Isaac and brother is impulsive and hate-raged Esau. We all fall short of the Lord's standards. So do you, so don't think it's just me or my family. For this reason our hope cannot rest on human nature or accomplishments. We all share in this fallen humanity and often act like my family or other biblical figures. I share with you my short comings... but you have them too. You are deceptive, and scheming. You may be unwitting or impulsive with hate welled up inside of you. Like those words you spoke... you made them sound a little worse so that you sound a little better... or you wanted to get back at your neighbor because he or she said or did something to you. You are like me... like my mother, Rebekah. When anger controls your thoughts and affects your actions, you are like my brother Esau. Welcome, members and friends of Christ Lutheran Church. Welcome to the family. You are no better than me.

Though my father, Isaac, was unwitting... mom and I helped with that... he knew enough for my sake to tell me to get away from Esau and into a place where I could find a wife from our own people. Now, it was during this journey that I had a dream. You heard about it in the text for today. A ladder with angels of God ascending and descending. What does it mean? I've thought of it many times since, and perhaps you have too.

In my dream God is bridging heaven and earth. The angels are not sitting still... they are not standing still. They come down and they go up. For the sake of God's people and His providence nothing remains fixed in the same condition during this uncertain period of mortal life. Nothing in this life remains constant and forever. Cities change and so do churches. Families are in flux...

constantly they are ascending and descending. An influential French monk of long ago by the name of Bernard of Clairvaux once said that, “Of necessity you either ascend or descend, and if you try to stand still you cannot but fall.” I guess life as a Christian is kind of like riding a bike...we are constantly moving, for if we stop, we fall to the left or to the right. And so it with heaven to earth... thank God.

God moves from heaven to earth, like the company of heaven was moving in my dream. God was giving me and His people a promise. From His people would He bring from heaven to earth a Messiah. Jesus is the promise, descending into this vale of tears we call life, meeting us where we are at in our struggles... in our needs. Jesus is not sitting or standing still for you. He is not watching you from the utter reaches of the universe calling out, “It’s going to be okay. Just tough it out for a little longer, it will get better.” No, Jesus is on the move. He descends into your miserable life. He is with you bearing the cross of life when you bear the cross of pain, discouragement or suffering... Because Jesus’ cross of life has all that He took on Himself for us... and more!!

Our God made a promise to my grandfather, Abraham. He said that his descendants would be as numerous as the stars in the sky. He made the same promise in a slightly different way that day I saw the angels ascending and descending. He said, “*Your offspring shall be like the dust of the earth.*” Then God said, “*Behold, I am with you and will keep you wherever you go... For I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you...*” That’s a promise from God. We can count on God to make good on His promises.

He was with us wherever we went. The heavenly hosts were on the move with our people when the famine in our land struck. God moved us to Egypt. The heavenly hosts were not standing still during all those years in the land of Goshen – even when we became slaves of the Egyptians. God was with us, heaven was on the move, when He lifted up Moses to lead us through the desert. God was with us during those trying times in Egypt and in the desert. He was not standing still. He was with us, moving us **through** the difficulties of our lives.

King David would say in Psalm 23, “*Ye, though I walk THROUGH the valley of the shadow of death...* because with angels ascending and descending heaven never has us stop. We do not set up camp in the valley of the shadow of death. God moves us through. That’s what He does. Our Jesus, with us each day, does not have us set up camp and stay in the desert of our lives. We may move slowly at times, but we never stop. It may take us 40 years in the desert, but the heavenly hosts never stop their parade of promise. And Jesus never leaves alone – especially when the journey gets tough.

God never said it was going to be easy... years in slavery, years in the desert. Yes, those were tough times for my people. But God does promise He will be active with us during those times... even so much so that He sent His one and only Son to be born and then die for us. That’s what I saw in that dream. God coming to His people... from heaven. In these travails of life, God is with you. He takes sinners like me... like my family... like you and still gives us a clear vision of that ladder. Heaven is open. The heavenly hosts are active. They are on the move... even when your life is so much on the move. “*Never will I leave you, never will I forsake you, declares the Lord.*” Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.