



July 19, 2020

Introduction

Invitation

Call to Worship:

Sometimes worship is like Jacob's ladder. We climb that ladder of faith higher and higher! Today, as we worship, let us remember that faith is a journey, and we never take it alone. Today, let us praise God, who is with us! Let us worship!

Hymn: "Surely the Presence of the Lord"

Reading the Word: Genesis 28:10-19a

Message: "Climbing Ladders"

Rev. Dr. Deb Hanson

Prayer:

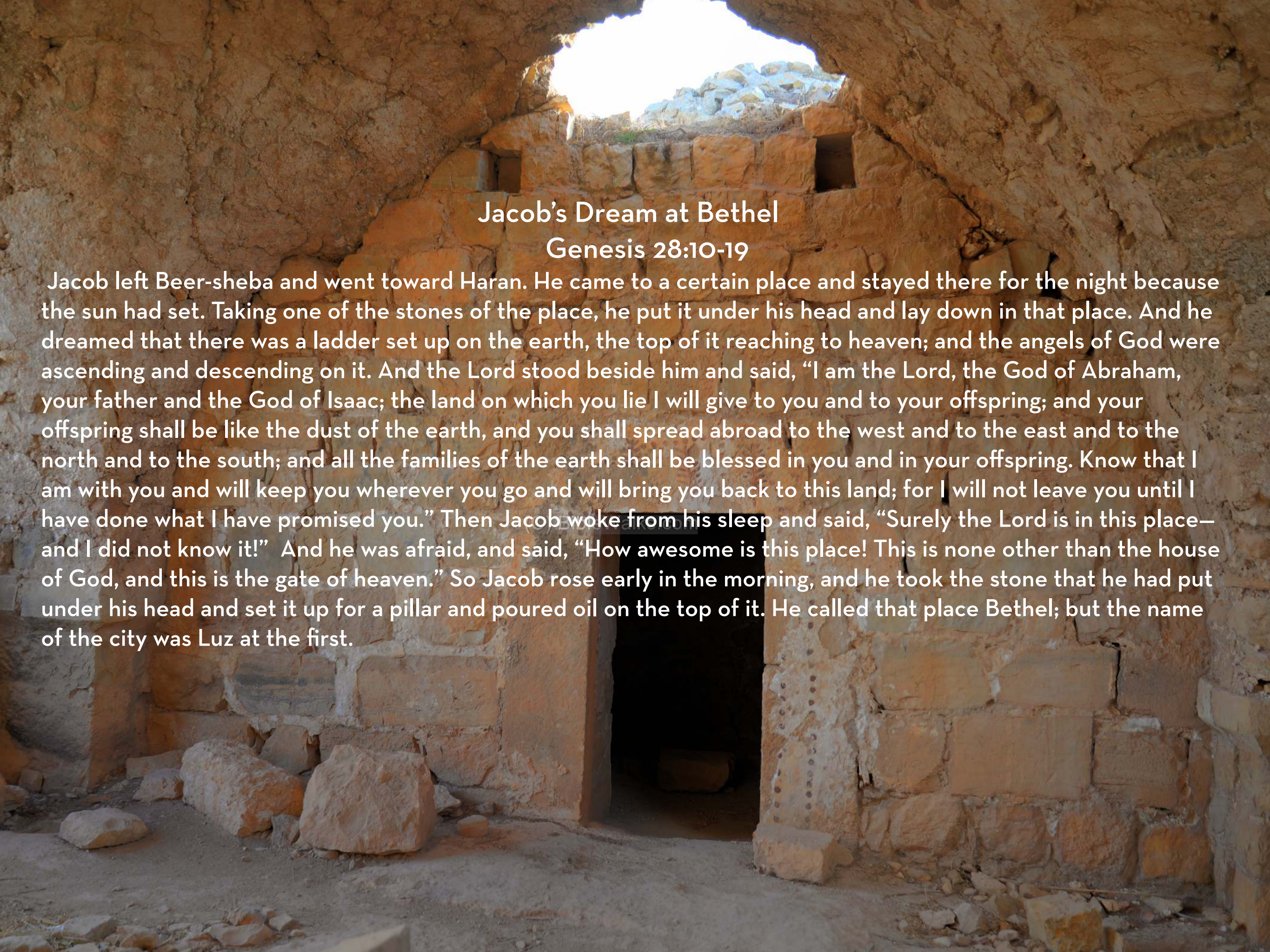
O God, Jacob found you in the wilderness, and you reassured and blessed him. We, too, long to recognize your blessing in our lives, and we look for your presence that is often right there in front of us. Sometimes, it seems as if we are climbing a long and high ladder to reach you, and we are reminded that we need to keep climbing. Help us to trust you and know that, even in the most challenging times of our lives, you are there. Help us to persevere on the ladder of faith, knowing that you are beside us in the climb. Amen.

The Lord's Prayer:

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name. Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil, for Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever. Amen.

Hymn: "We Are Climbing Jacob's Ladder"

Blessing

The image shows the interior of an ancient stone structure, likely a tomb or a small chapel. The walls are made of large, roughly-hewn, light-colored stone blocks. At the top, there is a large, irregular opening that looks like a natural rock overhang or a simple archway, through which bright light is streaming. Below this opening, the wall is built with several courses of stone blocks. In the center of the lower wall, there is a dark, rectangular doorway leading to another part of the structure. The floor is made of dirt and scattered stones. The overall atmosphere is one of a well-preserved but somewhat desolate ancient site.

Jacob's Dream at Bethel

Genesis 28:10-19

Jacob left Beer-sheba and went toward Haran. He came to a certain place and stayed there for the night because the sun had set. 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; the land on which you lie I will give to you and to your offspring; and your offspring shall be like the dust of the earth, and you shall spread abroad to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south; and all the families of the earth shall be blessed in you and in your offspring. Know that I am with you and will keep you wherever you go and will bring you back to this land; for I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you." 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." So Jacob rose early in the morning, and he took the stone that he had put under his head and set it up for a pillar and poured oil on the top of it. He called that place Bethel; but the name of the city was Luz at the first.



SERMON TRANSCRIPT GIVEN BY
Rev. Dr. Deb Hanson

Message “Climbing Ladders”
Rev. Dr. Deb Hanson

“. . . [Jacob] 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.’” Genesis 28:17 (NRSV)

A little over three weeks ago, I had surgery for a left knee replacement. Since I tend to do a lot of reflecting on life and life’s situations, I am sharing some random thoughts with you today that tie in with Jacob’s encounter with God in the wilderness. The vision of a ladder to heaven was particularly thought-provoking for me.

It reminds me that nearly everything is a process of moving forward, including recovery from surgery, earning a degree, growing in a relationship, and strengthening our faith. It is like climbing a ladder. Of course, in my recovery, climbing a ladder is a pretty daunting idea, but the goal is to eventually be able to climb stairs without too much difficulty and to strengthen the muscles that have been traumatized so the pain works its way out, and my quality of life will improve.

The journey of faith is just that - a journey, including ups and downs. We begin our journeys learning and growing in our relationship with God. There are times we might falter and go back down the ladder, and there are times when we surge forward with joy and enthusiasm. Some of us get stuck in the same place on the ladder because we find it a comfortable spot, and when we are pushed, we resist moving out of that comfort zone.

For Jacob, who was on the run to escape the anger of his brother, Esau, having the vision of the ladder to heaven opened his eyes to the fact that he was not the center of his world. God was with him, and God would guide him. Yet, Jacob’s journey of faith was full of self-centered and sometimes deceitful decisions. He often took three steps forward and two back, and his journey to maturity in his faith took his whole lifetime.

That’s what climbing the ladder of faith is for most of us, too. There is always room to grow, and just about the time that we think we have “arrived,” we discover that God isn’t finished with us yet. God pushes us out of our neatly designed and built comfortable boxes to discover new ways in which we can serve and share the love of God with others.

In my ponderings, I wonder if those are the doors of opportunity God is presenting to us during this challenging time of the Coronavirus and the reinvigorated call to work at changing racism. As we have seen the virus spread, we have seen people become frustrated, depressed, and weary of isolating and taking all the precautions. We have also seen tireless essential personnel who have cared for the sick, putting their own lives at risk. In the midst of what seems like a very dark time in our world, we have also witnessed the kindness and caring of others, and the hard work of those folks who provide for our needs, such as grocery store workers, gas station attendants, police, firefighters, bankers, and so many more.

Then, when the Black Lives Matter protests began, we saw many people rallying, standing up against racism, and demanding change and justice. It is our call to seek justice for all people and to educate ourselves on what racism is and how we may be complicit in it. That, too, is a lifelong process.

Our example is Jesus who welcomed all people, healed the sick, ate with the poor, called the temple leaders to accountability, taught about and showed God's love to everyone and trained his disciples to carry on his mission and ministry in the world. As for the church, that is our responsibility, too.

It seems to me that we are climbing some kind of ladder all the time. In order to keep growing, we need to move up another rung, and another, and another reaching toward the goal, or as Philippians 3:14 says, "... press on toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus."

We strive toward serving God to the best of our abilities. Sometimes that calls us to go up yet another rung of the ladder toward heaven. COVID-19 is calling us to new places and understandings of how we ARE TO BE the church in the world. Although we aren't in our beautiful church building, we are still the church of Jesus Christ in the world. Our calling is to follow the prophet Micah's words: in 3:8 - "What does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?"

May we keep climbing the ladder of God's love in our lives. May we share that love through acceptance and compassion. May we claim our calling as the Church of Jesus Christ to share the Good News of God's love with others wherever we are. Amen.