

"The Living God" Genesis 28:10-17 Trinity 19 2022

Jacob was fleeing for his life. His mother, Rebekah, had told Jacob to trick his father, Isaac, to get his blessing. Jacob had not wanted to do it, but Rebekah pushed him into it and half-blind old Isaac had given him the blessing. Esau was furious and was out to pay his brother back. Rebekah got wind of Esau's rage, and Jacob fled, a poor fugitive with only the clothes on his back and a staff in his hand.

At night he slept on the rocks. But while he slept, he dreamed, and through his dream, God spoke to him. Jacob saw in his dream a ladder. The top reached God, and the foot of the ladder was beside him. On the ladder, the angels went up and down between him and God. To the penniless outcast, God spoke and gave the promise that the ground on which he lay would be his, that God would multiply him and make from him a blessing for all the people of the earth.

The experience of the dream shook Jacob. When he woke, he was filled with fear. The mighty God was there with him and had lovingly spoken to him. Or was it only a dream? How could Jacob be sure? If it were truly God, then His words would be fulfilled. Jacob trusted that this was truly God, and took Him at His word.

What happened after our text? Did God keep His promise? Well, Jacob journeyed on to Haran. There, for many years, he was put through difficult times. As he had deceived his father, so now he was

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deceived by Laban, both as to his bride and as to his wages. But through all this, he carried the memory of God's promise, and God did bless him. Jacob prospered despite Laban's double-dealing.

After these years he returned to the land of his father Isaac, the land that God had promised to him. At Peniel, Jacob wrestled with God and was not overthrown, for he held God to His promise. God is captive to His Word because He cannot break His promise. Jacob built on that.

Then Jacob faced Esau, and by all human calculation of numbers and strength, Esau could keep Jacob out of the promised land. But God had promised it, and Jacob entered. After his return, double sorrow overtook him. He buried his father and Rachel whom he had so dearly loved.

Never could Jacob delude himself into thinking that he was the master of his life and the controller of his destiny. What good came to him he could not chalk up to his virtue.

All this that we are told about Jacob is not designed to glorify Jacob but to glorify the living God. When we are shocked by the shady and downright wicked things that the patriarchs did, it is clear that God did not bother about these men because they were such splendid examples of morality and wisdom. That they certainly were not. So the

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reason for God's concern for them was not in them but only in God. The more shabby their track record, the more amazing the grace of God that so patiently cared for them and brought them through their lives. God had given them His promise, and He could not go back on His word.

Jacob, however, was never allowed to suppose that he had God in his pocket, so to speak. Never in his life could he say, "Now I have everything wrapped up and figured out because I am such a great guy." No, there were times in his life when it looked like everything contradicted his conviction that God was on his side. Many times when Jacob was with Laban he must have thought, "Has God deceived me?" Jacob only had God's word. When he stood at the graves of his father Isaac and his beloved wife Rachel, or when his sons brought him the blood-stained coat of many colours, or when, as an old man, he said farewell to the promised land to go into the strange and distant land of Egypt, he must have questioned, "Is God a deceiver or is He true?" At many points in his life, it may have seemed overwhelmingly to Jacob that God had tricked him. We have the advantage of seeing the outline of the whole course of his life and can see more clearly the fulfilling hand of God. But for Jacob, this was mostly only a fact that he grasped by faith. Yet he did return to Bethel, and God did keep His promise that He had made to the fleeing fugitive with only a staff in his hand.

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Jacob knew that God was the Lord who, through all his ups and downs and despite his sin, had led him, blessed him, and kept His promise to him. God had proved Himself. His action proved it, for He is the active, the doing, the living God, who beyond all human calculation takes a hand in our lives and fits them into the fulfillment of His purposes. In doing this God involves Himself with us. God commits Himself to us by His promises and proves Himself by the specific action that fulfills the promises. Here is the living God who is not some abstract notion or idea but is actively and personally present in our lives with His plans and actions.

That God has involved Himself with us we know more clearly than Jacob ever knew. We know the actions of God by which He became a Man here among us, lived our life with us, and gave His life for us so that He would be our God and we would be His people. He has done it. God kept His promises. He is the true, living God. His action proves it.

God has, quite incredibly, committed Himself to us in Christ. In Him, our standing with God is based entirely on God's free and undeserved love and not on any action of ours. Our standing is not based on what splendid examples of morality and wisdom we are. We are not.

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Christ died in our place so we may not be condemned and punished for our sins. He takes all that for us so we may be forgiven and may know the living God who graciously involves Himself with us and we with Him. He rescued us from ruin and makes us members of His family and wants to have us always with Him.

We are often at Bethel, whether in this house of God when He speaks to us through His words from the pages of our Bibles or from some passage that we carry in our memory. We are at Bethel in the Sacrament, and when we recognize the hand of God in our lives.

Christ is the ladder that makes these things into Bethel, the house of God, whether we are in this house or somewhere else. Because of Christ, the angels of God are with us. Because of Christ, God's presence goes with us wherever we go. This is not only His presence by which He is everywhere in the universe at the same time. No, He is with us in a personal way. He is our God, watching over us, listening to our prayers, and speaking to us in His Word. He graciously is with us, blessing us and claiming us as His own. All this is because of Christ, who became the ladder that connects earth to heaven.

So the living God deals with us, speaks with us, and gives us His promises. We know that He is the living God as His fulfilling actions show, even though for a time our eyes may not see. Even though

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sorrows may overtake us, He is still with us. Even though doubts may arise about whether God is the One who keeps His promises, faith takes hold of Him as the living God who graciously involves Himself with us. Faith believes that the ladder, Christ, is with us always, even to the end of the age.

In the Name of this true and faithful and living God. Amen.