

Sermon and Readings Eighth Sunday After Pentecost 19th July 2026

Genesis 28.10–19a

¹⁰ Jacob left Beer-sheba and went towards Haran. ¹¹ 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. ¹² 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. ¹³ 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; ¹⁴ 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. ¹⁵ 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.' ¹⁶ Then Jacob woke from his sleep and said, 'Surely the LORD is in this place—and I did not know it!' ¹⁷ 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.' ¹⁸ 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. ¹⁹ He called that place Bethel; but the name of the city was Luz at the first.

Psalm 139.1–11; 139.23–24

- ¹ O Lord, you have searched me out and known me:
you know when I sit or when I stand, you comprehend my thoughts long before.
- ² You discern my path and the places where I rest:
you are acquainted with all my ways.
- ³ For there is not a word on my tongue:
but you, Lord, know it altogether.
- ⁴ You have encompassed me behind and before:
and have laid your hand upon me.
- ⁵ Such knowledge is too wonderful for me:
so high that I cannot endure it.
- ⁶ Where shall I go from your spirit:
or where shall I flee from your presence?
- ⁷ If I ascend into heaven you are there:
if I make my bed in the grave you are there also.
- ⁸ If I spread out my wings towards the morning:
or dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea,

- ⁹ Even there your hand shall lead me:
and your right hand shall hold me.
- ¹⁰ If I say 'Surely the darkness will cover me:
and the night will enclose me',
- ¹¹ The darkness is no darkness with you, but the night is as clear as the day:
the darkness and the light are both alike.
- ²³ Search me out, O God, and know my heart:
put me to the proof and know my thoughts.
- ²⁴ Look well lest there be any way of wickedness in me:
and lead me in the way that is everlasting.

Romans 8.12–25

¹² So then, brothers and sisters, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh— ¹³ for if you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. ¹⁴ For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. ¹⁵ For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption. When we cry, 'Abba! Father!' ¹⁶ it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, ¹⁷ and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ—if, in fact, we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him. ¹⁸ I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us. ¹⁹ For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God; ²⁰ for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope ²¹ that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. ²² We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labour pains until now; ²³ and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies. ²⁴ For in hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen? ²⁵ But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.

Matthew 13.24–30, 13.36–43

²⁴ He put before them another parable: 'The kingdom of heaven may be compared to someone who sowed good seed in his field; ²⁵ but while everybody was asleep, an enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and then went away. ²⁶ So when the plants came up and bore grain, then the weeds appeared

as well. ²⁷ And the slaves of the householder came and said to him, “Master, did you not sow good seed in your field? Where, then, did these weeds come from?” ²⁸ He answered, “An enemy has done this.” The slaves said to him, “Then do you want us to go and gather them?” ²⁹ But he replied, “No; for in gathering the weeds you would uproot the wheat along with them. ³⁰ Let both of them grow together until the harvest; and at harvest time I will tell the reapers, Collect the weeds first and bind them in bundles to be burned, but gather the wheat into my barn.” ’ ³⁶ Then he left the crowds and went into the house. And his disciples approached him, saying, ‘Explain to us the parable of the weeds of the field.’ ³⁷ He answered, ‘The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man; ³⁸ the field is the world, and the good seed are the children of the kingdom; the weeds are the children of the evil one, ³⁹ and the enemy who sowed them is the devil; the harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are angels. ⁴⁰ Just as the weeds are collected and burned up with fire, so will it be at the end of the age. ⁴¹ The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will collect out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all evildoers, ⁴² and they will throw them into the furnace of fire, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. ⁴³ Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Let anyone with ears listen!

Sermon

Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of our hearts be acceptable to you, O Lord, our rock and our redeemer.

A rock, a ladder, and a promise to a fella running o save himself. That is today’s story in Genesis. Jacob is in a terrible state. He stole his brother Esau’s birthright and his blessing, and Esau is fed up. He decides in Genesis 27 to set aside a bit time to mourn his father Isaac, but once it is over, he wants to kill Jacob. Rebekah finds out and tells Jacob he needs to run away, fast. So, Jacob sets out.

There is very little that is good about Jacob. Even his name means “cheater,” and he seems to live up to it. We might even question why God keeps providing for him, why God continues to come through for him, why God chooses him to be the vessel through which the entire nation of Israel will be built.

We should take God’s choice of Jacob as great good news. Why? Because it takes away the burden and the misconception of personal worth being needed for us to serve God. Jacob doesn’t learn much during his life. His life with his children is likewise troubled and his life is poorly managed as is his relationships his parents.

Yet none of that matters. At Jacob's lowest point—fleeing his brother's justified anger, burdened by repeated wrongdoing, and showing no repentance—God comes to him and promises extraordinary things.

It is easy to think we will answer God's call only once our lives are in order—once we have sorted a few more things out, broken a few bad habits, survived a difficult season, or found a new job, partner, or home. Yet this story reminds us that God's call often comes in the midst of our sin, fear, and brokenness. When we are most lost, God reaches out and promises us everything.

We have all stood where Jacob stood that night: alone in the wilderness, afraid, wondering whether his brother might find him in the dark and kill him. Our circumstances may not be as extreme, but we can imagine his struggle to sleep, with so little comfort that even a stone had to serve as his pillow.

How often have you stayed awake at night, weighed down by worry and despair until your pillow feels like stone? No matter how you turn, you cannot settle, because the turmoil in your mind has tightened your whole body. It is hardest when, like Jacob, we know we have brought ourselves to that lonely, frightening place.

Then comes the astonishing dream: a ladder reaching to heaven, with angels ascending and descending. This vibrant image has stirred artists' imaginations for centuries and found a lasting place in music and mythology. At first glance, it seems to suggest that we are meant to climb toward God, growing in wisdom and virtue as we rise toward heaven.

But God never tells Jacob—or anyone else—to climb the ladder. In fact, the meaning is the reverse. The text says Jacob dreamed of “a ladder set up on the earth, the top of it reaching to heaven,” with angels moving up and down upon it. Then, in the very next verse, “the LORD stood beside him.” So where is God? Not at the top, looking down and calling us upward, but beside Jacob. God has come down the ladder to meet him.

This is a profound theological moment in the Hebrew Scriptures, rich in meaning on its own. Yet as Christians, we cannot help seeing in it a glimpse of the Incarnation: God coming down from heaven, meeting us where we are, standing beside us, guiding us, and promising to remain with us. This is the story of Jesus Christ, born as one of us and dwelling among us.

And Jacob, a man not known for strong spiritual awareness, instantly grasps the magnitude of his experience. “Jacob woke from his sleep and said, ‘Surely the LORD is in this place—and I did not know it!’” In response, he turns the stone that served as his pillow into a memorial. This is a deeply human instinct, found across many cultures. Yet the meanings of our stone monuments can shift over time as later generations re-examine the histories they commemorate.

God promises to redeem all things in the fullness of time. Wherever human sin and destruction leave their mark, God surrounds them with beauty, love, and the promise of restoration. God’s promise reaches even into the painful chapters of history: “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.” This promise is not only for Jacob, and not only for us. It is also for all those who have been displaced from their homes and forced into exile, including our brothers and sisters living as refugees amid conflict and violence around the world today.

Jacob took the stone that had served as a hard pillow in a barren place and made it a sacred memorial. Perhaps we, too, might learn to stop building monuments to our own imagined greatness and instead dedicate the stones of our loneliness and brokenness, trusting that they often become the places where we encounter God most deeply. Amen.