

Reflection

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Sunday, April 26, 2020

Scripture-Genesis 28:10-19a

Many months ago, I agreed to preach on this last Sunday in April, when Pastor Laura would not be preaching. Never did I imagine that we would not be in the pews in Grand Ledge or that our worship services would be completely virtual. As I thought about the daunting task of writing a sermon like what I am used to preaching, I realized I couldn't do it. I didn't have the head space to write one and I'm guessing you are ok with a much briefer reflection from me. Our ability to focus for longer times is missing for many of us. And my sense is that what we are looking for are things that comfort and encourage us. So I share this reflection with you.

Have you ever looked for your glasses or sunglasses, only to find them on top of your head? Have you searched for your phone and then realized it was in your hand? Have you rushed out the door (back when we could drive a lot more) looking for your keys and asking for help to find them, only to see that they are right in front of you? Even before these times of the corona virus, we were often distracted, busy and finding it hard to focus, and we sometimes missed the obvious. The things that were right in front of us and beside us and in this place with us.

In this morning's reading from Genesis, we hear the story of Jacob that is often referred to as "Jacob's ladder." Jacob is running for his life from his family. He is escaping his brother's anger. His mother has urged him to go, trying to protect him. He is making his way from Bear-sheba to Haran to save his life.

Along the way, he stops at nightfall. All alone and full of anxiety and exhaustion, he settles into sleep with his head on a rock for a pillow. He has a dream. In that dream, he sees a ladder reaching from Earth to heaven. There are messengers going up and down the ladder. The messengers carry to God the fear, guilt and suffering of Jacob. The messengers bring to Jacob God's presence, God's words and God's promises to Jacob. They are not new promises, but they are received in a new way.

God said, "know that I am with you and will keep you wherever you go."

This is a time of transformation for Jacob. Some theologians have suggested that if Jacob had not been experiencing a crisis, he would not have been open to the dream he had and to God's message. Had the dream come when Jacob's life was going as planned, he would have ignored the dream.

This might resonate with us as we find ourselves in such an unexpected time. A time of being vulnerable. A time of crisis. A time that is so unplanned and is filled with uncertainty. How might we be open to God and God's messages in new ways in these times?

We hear in the scripture that Jacob comes to see the place where he has slept and dreamt, and has experienced God, as sacred space, because of the presence of God. God comes to us in all places, creating so many sacred spaces. Sometimes we think of our church building as the most sacred place. A formal place where we gather, a place with an altar and with pews and candles.

Perhaps the recent stay at home practices have helped us to find new sacred places, especially as we gather together from our home for this time of worship, prayer and reflection. We might be finding that what we are living through right now is teaching us new ways to experience God and to find sacred space. Maybe it's finding a quiet place in our home or some time in nature, or

sunshine and longer days, connecting with friends in new ways, the joy of seeing family from far away, or maybe it's in the room in your home where you now watch worship online. Have you found some new sacred space?

While we are likely not on the run like Jacob, but rather hunkered down in our homes, we may be experiencing much of what Jacob was: anxiety, fear, isolation. We are living in a new world. A world that can be exhausting. Some of us are working full-time and are doing home schooling that we never expected to do. Some of us are experiencing isolation because loved ones cannot visit us and we are living alone. Some of us have children and grandchildren that we can't see. Some of us are worried about how to feed our families and to keep them safe. Nothing has prepared us for this.

I've read this scripture many times, but as I was working on this message, this is what jumped off the page for me....."Surely, the Lord is in this place and I didn't know it." So while we didn't immediately find our glasses or our phone or our car keys, we don't always find God. There is so much on our hearts and minds right now. It's understandable that we might not see God. We are wondering when life will return to normal, when we can see friends and family in person, when we can go to the grocery store without rushing and worrying that we might catch the virus.

It's easy to understand that we might miss God's presence. Without being intentional. Without seeking God during these very unusual and challenging times. We might miss how God is working in our lives. How God is present with us always, especially during the hard times. So how might we seek out God in new and intentional ways in these times?

One of the things I have been doing during this time to be more connected with God is to read prayers from the Iona Community. The Iona Community describes itself as a dispersed Christian ecumenical community working for peace and social justice, rebuilding of community and the renewal of worship. I share this prayer from the Iona Community with you....

God of constant change, God of steadfast love: so much of what is familiar, is being put to rest, perhaps for a spell, perhaps for good. May we who believe in life after death, have faith to lay aside tired ways, and to trust that what is true, and good and life-giving, will re-emerge, from this cocooning tomb, transformed into a fuller embodiment, of what always was. Amen

I hope this morning's story from so long ago can bring us comfort in this time. God is with us and around us and seeks us out and shows up in unexpected places, in sacred places and in not so sacred places.

May it be so.

Peace to you all, from Karen.