



CHRISTIAN EDUCATION DEPARTMENT

A Devotion During This Time of the Coronavirus Pandemic Seventh Sunday after Pentecost, July 19, 2020

Bethel!

by Garland F. Pierce

Genesis 28:10-19a

28:10 Jacob left Beer-sheba and went toward Haran.

28:11 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.

28:12 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.

28:13 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;

28:14 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.

28:15 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."

28:16 Then Jacob woke from his sleep and said, "Surely the LORD is in this place--and I did not know it!"

28:17 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."

28:18 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.

28:19a He called that place Bethel; but the name of the city was Luz at the first.

Jacob is in transition, leaving home in search of his future. Isaac has blessed him and sent him in search of a wife from Rebekah's people. Jacob is alone, leaving the familiar and traveling the unfamiliar. He grows tired, finds a stone for his pillow, and sleeps.

No four walls or a roof, no doors or windows, yet that night a house came into being. This house has no walls but a stone, no roof, but a ladder extending to heaven, no doors, but a way forward, no windows, but a profound promise. Jacob's dream revealed to him the glory of God as well as God's incredible and inconceivable promise. A place that had been unfamiliar has now been revealed as holy. Jacob declares, "Surely the LORD is in this place--and I did not know it!" Awestruck, he says, "How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven." Early in the morning he rises, takes his stone pillow, placing it on a pillar, anoints it with oil, and calls that place, Bethel, the house of God.

Bethel is the place where God shows up, the place where God's promises are proclaimed. God's promise to Jacob was reminiscent of God's promise to Jacob's grandfather, Abraham—land for possession, descendants too numerous to count, and God's abiding presence. Bethel is the place of God's presence and God's promise.

In this moment when so many grieve our inability to gather in our Bethels by that name or some other and when it remains unclear in so many areas just how and when we will safely gather in person again, Jacob's naming is good news. The history and even the expansion of the African Methodist Episcopal Church follow in the tradition of Jacob's proclamation. Wherever God is, we call that place Bethel. Wherever God's presence is felt and God's promise is proclaimed is the house of God. There really are no architectural requirements. Bethel is an old blacksmith shop where sable sons and daughters could worship God in spirit and truth and do so unapologetically and unashamedly, hearing the promise that whom the savior sets free is truly free indeed. Bethel is the hush harbors where enslaved Africans danced the ring shout, praying and planning for freedom. Bethel is the clearings in rural Africa and India where humble Christians gather and bring God their best and their all, singing, "Praise God from whom all blessing flow" in their mother tongues and heart languages. Bethel can be found in the streets of protest where faithful declare that "Black Lives Matter!" Even still, Bethel is when we gather virtually and declare, "I was glad when they said unto me, 'Let us go to the house of the Lord!' Our feet shall stand within thy gates, O Jerusalem." Bethel is where we hear the promise anew that is akin to the promises our fore parents heard, "This too shall pass!" "It shall be well!" "Know that I am with you and will keep you wherever you go..."

TALK: Take a moment to be silent, reflect, and share (write down)—How will you open yourself up to God even in unexpected places? What will your next faithful step be?

PRAY:

God of our fathers and mothers—
of all the generations who have come before us—
holy is Your name.

We come in Your presence with praise and thanksgiving
for the faithful love You have shown toward Your people,
for the many blessings You have given to us.
Your promises are eternal,

and they are backed by the honor of Your name.

Thank you for Your faithful presence among us,
even when we are not fully aware of it.
Continue to reveal Yourself to us.
Open our eyes to see You here among us;
open our ears to hear Your Word.
For surely, You are with us in this place.

In the name of Jesus Christ, we pray.
Amen.

adapted from <https://re-worship.blogspot.com/2011/07/opening-prayer-genesis-28.html>

ACT:

1. Based on your answers regarding opening up yourself to God in unexpected places, come up with a plan and start taking your next faithful steps.
2. See also the activity that accompanies this devotion.
3. Revisit the Psalm 23 Challenge first issued as part of the March 22, 2020 set of resources.

Song:

We Are Climbing Jacob's Ladder
AMEC Hymnal, #363

1. We are climb-ing Ja-cob's lad-der, We are climb-ing Ja-cob's ladder
We are climb-ing Ja-cob's ladder, Sol-diers of the cross.
2. Ev-ery round goes high-er, high-er, Ev-ery round goes high-er, high-er
Ev-ery round goes high-er, high-er, Sol-diers of the cross.
3. Sin-ner, do you love my Je-sus? Sin-ner, do you love my Je-sus?
Sin-ner, do you love my Je-sus? Sol-diers of the cross.
4. If you love Him, why not serve Him? If you love Him, why not serve Him?
If you love Him, why not serve Him? Sol-diers of the cross.
5. We are climb-ing high-er, high-er. We are climb-ing, high-er, high-er.
We are climb-ing high-er, high-er. Sol-diers of the cross.

Physical space—You may wish to create a dedicated space for your time of devotion. You may choose to place a candle, bible, and special symbols or material/fabric to help you focus and center during this time of reflection and prayer.

If you use this meditation and exercise in a time of family or group devotion, share in the leadership; allow different persons to read or lead different parts of this meditation.



Title: "The Dream of Jacob" by contemporary Chinese artist He Qi

The Christian Education Department will continue to develop resources that can be used as times of personal and collective devotion and study during this pandemic to help us all sustain and strengthen our faith and resolve.