

**Bible Study**  
**Seventh Sunday after Pentecost, Proper 11, Year A**  
**July 23, 2017**

[RCL:] Genesis 28:10-19a; Psalm 139: 1-11, 22-23; Romans 8:12-25. Matthew 13:24-30,36-43

**Genesis 28:10-19a**

Jacob is on the run. He and Rebekah, his mother, have connived to deceive his father, Isaac, into giving Jacob his older brother Esau's birthright. Jacob's deception, which led Isaac to grant him the blessing due the first-born son, fuels hatred in Esau. When Rebekah is told that Esau plans to kill Jacob, she sends Jacob away to her brother in Haran.

Our story begins when Jacob stops on his first night on the road. He lays down with a stone under his head for a pillow and falls asleep. Little does he know that he is on sacred ground. Jacob dreams of a ladder or ziggurat to heaven with angels climbing up and down. However, it is not the angels who speak to Jacob, but God. God stands beside Jacob and introduces himself: "I am the Lord, the God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac" (verse 13).

God makes the same promises to Jacob that he made to Jacob's ancestors: land and offspring. In a sense, God includes a caveat with his blessings. In essence, God tells Jacob, "You will be blessed when I fulfill my promises to you. But these blessings are not for you to hoard. It is through you and your family that all the families of the earth shall be blessed." God then makes a personal promise to Jacob: "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" (verse 15). God's promises of presence and protection – of belonging to God – are central to the covenant relationship between God and his chosen people.

Jacob awakes a transformed man. He recognizes the awesomeness and sacredness of his encounter with God and commemorates it with a shrine made with the stone on which he slept, calling the place *Beth-el*, "House of God."

- Are you hoarding the blessings God has given you? How can you channel your blessings so that you will become a blessing to others?
- How has your experience of God's grace transformed you?

**Psalm 139:1-11, 22-23**

The psalmist, resting assured in God's promised presence and protection, turns to God for deliverance from his enemies. His blessing is his relationship with God. The psalmist addresses God by his personal divine name, *YHWH* ("LORD") (verses 1, 3), and speaks to God directly: "you know" (verses 1, 3), "you discern" (verse 1), "you trace" (verse 2), "you press" (verse 4), "[you] lay your hand" (verse 4). The psalmist is awed by the completeness of God's all-encompassing knowledge of him; God knows his actions, thoughts, and words (verses 1-3).

The psalmist affirms that God is always present with him. No matter where the psalmist goes, whether to the extremes of heaven or the grave, “Even there your hand will lead me and your right hand hold me fast” (verse 9). The psalmist trusts his future to God, assured that he belongs to God. He welcomes God’s testing, which will reveal the psalmist’s righteousness and commitment to following the ways of God (verses 23-24).

- Does God knowing you fully make you uncomfortable? Are you able to say with the psalmist with no reservations: “LORD, you have searched me out and known me”?
- Have you ever wanted to escape from the presence of God? When and why?

### **Romans 8:12-25**

To Paul, every human being is subject to some power, and lives either in the domain of the flesh, under the power of sin, death and law; or in the domain of the Spirit, under the power of grace. Paul has assured believers in an earlier verse that they no longer live in the domain of the flesh, but now live in the domain of the Spirit, because the Spirit of God dwells in them (Romans 8:9).

In today’s passage, Paul describes life in the Spirit in terms of relationships. “All who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God” (verse 14). The indwelling Spirit is God’s presence with believers. Believers are blessed; we belong to God’s family – children of God by adoption (verses 14-15). We are God’s heirs and, therefore, joint heirs with Christ, sharing in his suffering, death, resurrection and glory (verse 17). We are to live unafraid, knowing that we belong to God.

Just as God fulfilled his promises to Jacob, Paul admonishes believers to wait with patience because God will fulfill his promise of future glory. God will free all of creation “from its bondage to decay” (verse 21). Believers and all creation must endure the birth pangs of the completion of salvation – of the promised restoration of creation to what God intended it to be, begun when God chose a people to be his instruments of blessing.

- In what ways do you sense that you are living in the “in-between” time?
- Discuss your experience of life in the Spirit.

### **Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43**

In the parable of the weeds among the wheat, Jesus compares the kingdom of heaven to a field sowed by two sowers.

The master sows good wheat seeds in his field. At night, an enemy comes and sows weeds among the wheat seeds. When the wheat comes up and bears grain, the weeds come up as well. The master refuses to let his slaves gather the weeds. He tells them to let both of them grow together until the harvest, when the reapers will collect the weeds to be burned and gather the wheat into the barn.

Jesus privately interprets the parable to his disciples as an allegory. He is the master, and the good seeds are the children of Kingdom of God. The enemy is the devil, and the weeds are the children of the evil one. At the final judgment, the Son of Man will send his angels to root out sin and evildoers, and the righteous will inherit the Kingdom. God's promise in the parable is that evil will not overcome the good.

There is a more contemporary dimension to the parable. In a previous chapter from Matthew, Jesus called us to "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near" or "is at hand" (Matthew 4:17). Could it be that the final judgment isn't a distant event in linear time but is now? Could it be that the Kingdom isn't someplace that will be established in the future but is here now? Were both inaugurated with the coming of God in Jesus?

Jesus issues a warning: Those who reject Jesus' message are refusing to participate in the Kingdom. They are refusing to be the blessing to all the families of the earth that God calls believers to be. Those who accept Jesus' message and follow the praxis of the Beatitudes belong to God, are his children and have inherited the promised Kingdom.

- What is the relationship between the church and the Kingdom of God?
- How does your faith that God's Kingdom will triumph over evil and death influence the way you live?

*Published by the Office of Formation of The Episcopal Church, 815 Second Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10017. © 2017 The Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States of America. All rights reserved.*