

Trinity 9 (2022)

We come this morning to the third and indeed the most colorful of the Patriarchs in Genesis – Jacob.

The patriarchs – as I am sure you know – are the fathers of the family from which came the nation of Israel and ultimately the Lord Jesus Christ.

**Abraham** was the first. When he heard God’s call, he was living in Mesopotamia. He dared to believe God and to do as God directed . . . to make the journey to the land God promised to give his offspring, the land of Caanan.

For this reason, he has gone down in history as the ‘Father of Faith’.

The second patriarch was **Isaac**, sometimes called the ‘Son of Promise’. Last week we looked at the saga of how Isaac got his wife, Rebecca.

As there is no hint of polygamy in their story, Isaac and Rebecca’s union has often been held up as a model for what God intended for marriage: one man and one woman in an exclusive, lifelong relationship.

Hence, in older editions of the Book of Common Prayer, we find them referenced in the marriage service. One of the prayers reads:

“Send thy blessing upon these thy servants, this man and this woman, whom we bless in thy Name; that, **as Isaac and Rebecca lived faithfully together, so these persons may surely perform and keep the vow and covenant betwixt them made . . .**” ///

Abraham, Isaac and this morning we come to the third patriarch, **Jacob**. Again, he is by far the most colorful.

A cheat, a swindler and liar, yet chosen of God. Jacob is to be the bearer of the covenant promise.

In today’s passage, we hear God making to him the same vow He had made earlier to Jacob’s grandfather and father:

**“In you and in your seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed.”**

What are we to make of God's choice of Isaac?

Might not God ought to run a background check and get a psychological evaluation on anyone being considered for such a weighty mission?

NO! The God of the Bible is free like the wind. His choices are not based on merit or endowment but on grace.

He acts according to the counsel of His own sovereign will.

If I am sounding like a Presbyterian, so be it! This is what we find happening again and again in the Bible. God choosing 'dodgy' characters to bring about His purposes of good.

Not only does He call them, He transforms them. In Jacob's case, it took a number of years and various encounters and circumstances to turn this rascal into a saint, but it happened.

Beyond where we left off reading, he gets a new name. Jacob the 'supplanter' or 'trickster' becomes Israel. The meaning of this latter name is 'ruler with God'.

His offspring will be the progenitors of the 12 tribes of Israel. From one of his sons – Judah – will come the great King David and further on down the line, Jesus.

There is surely a lesson here for us. If God can transform and use Jacob, He can transform and use even the worst of us! So, don't despair! Our God is sovereign and powerful.

Now onto the story of Jacob and his famous ladder.

As this saga begins, Jacob is on the run. He has swindled his twin brother Esau out of not only his birthright but also the blessing the older son customarily received from his father. Esau is out for blood, and Jacob has to leave home in a hurry.

But he is on a mission as well. His father has instructed him not to take a wife from the idol-worshipping people all round them in the land of Caanan, but to go back to the 'old country' and get a wife there.

The first night on the road for Jacob, who was a bed and slipper type guy, could not have been very pleasant. He has to sleep outdoors with only stones for a pillow.

How miserable and alone he must have felt, but he was not alone. God was with him and gives him an extraordinary vision of a ladder or perhaps a ziggurat reaching up to heaven.

What might this ladder or ziggurat signify?

I want to suggest it represents God's plan to reunite earth and heaven, His plan to put the world ripped apart by sin back together again.

Let's go back a bit. Remember what happened to Adam and Eve after they had disobeyed. They were cast out from the garden. The gate into Eden was fast shut to them.

At that time a barrier was placed between earth and heaven . . . between man's space and God's space. ///

Advance now a few slides forward. What do we find going on in the story of Babel? ///

Is it not humans attempting to get back into Eden, back into heaven, and trying to do so on their own terms?

Their efforts, as I am sure you will remember. proved futile.

The great tower or ziggurat they were attempting to build was never finished. God confused their tongues (hence the name, Babel, or babble) and scattered them.

In today's episode, we discover that what they could not do, God was in fact planning to do. The ladder seen in Jacob's vision is a foreshadowing of this uniting man with his Creator.

But, who would bring this reunion about? Who would open heaven's gates?

Answer: Jesus, the God-Man. He was and is the true ladder that links earth and heaven.

And, Jacob himself would be a part of this ladder, inasmuch as Jesus would come from his line of descent.

All roads in the Old Testament, you see, lead to Jesus.

The place Jacob slept that night, Bethel, as it came to be called, was one of those places where earth and heaven overlapped and joined.

A future one would be the Holy of Holies, first in the wilderness tabernacle and later in the Temple in Jerusalem.

But the full realization of this overlap of earth and heaven would be with Jesus Himself.

**“Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them . . .”** we hear the seer say in Chapter 24 of Revelation.

The incarnation has happened. God has become man in Jesus Christ, but the full realization of this coming together of earth and heaven awaits our Lord’s Second Coming.

In the meantime, places like Bethel still exist. They tell us God is not far away off, but only a breath away.

As God opened the eyes of Jacob and allowed him to glimpse up into heaven, so he does on occasion today.

Something like this happened to an early member of St. Luke’s. His name was Mike Krutulis. During a yard cleanup, not long after this church was built, I noticed Mike standing at the Jones Street entrance looking up at the church.

I walked over to where he was and asked what he was looking at.

With a serene smile on his face, he said: **“Look, the church and heaven are one.”**

I know what those words means theologically, but what he was actually seeing at that moment I shall probably never know in this life. Perhaps it was something similar to Jacob's Ladder.

The rest of the story is that a week or so later, Mike died rather unexpectedly at home. What he saw as a vision, no doubt, he sees now with eyes wide open.

Visions such as Mike's, no doubt, have significance, but our focus must always be on the God-Man, Jesus Christ. He is our ladder.

Moreover, when you and I are united to Him in faith and baptism, we ourselves become one of those places where earth and heaven overlap.

**“Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and *that* the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?”** asks St. Paul in 1 Corinthians 3:16.

Think about that this week as you go about your many tasks: **Never alone, no never alone. God is above me, God is beside me, and God is in me.**

Because of which, I have the power to do those things which are right, to resist the temptations of the world, the flesh and the devil; to make a difference in the lives of others; to be a blessing; and in the end go where my Lord has gone.

The door closed to Adam and Eve has been opened for all believers. I can go in. Thanks be to God!