

July 23, 2017
"Destiny"

Morning
Brood 



Hawfields
Presbyterian
Church

(16th Sunday in Ordinary Time)

Genesis 28:10-19a; **Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43**

Where are we really headed? Not just then, but now?

In other words, while we might rest assured of our place in heaven, our destiny is well beyond simply destination. It encompasses our daily life as well: not just our end, but our moments.

And so the steps we take matter. The steps we are willing to take matter. And not just for ourselves, but for the generations that will follow us. Thus what may be comfortable space for us in terms of belief, practice, even in our assessment of our own history, must necessarily be pushed by what our children know and need. Not just the children of our house, but the children we have yet to see.

Presbyterian theology, Reformed Theology, includes the idea of predestination: the notion that God has prescribed our place. But this notion doesn't at all negate our responsibility for choosing and to be held accountable for those choices. For embracing the destiny God offers us.



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Genesis 28:10-19a

10 Jacob left Beer-sheba and set out for Haran. **11** He reached a certain place and spent the night there. When the sun had set, he took one of the stones at that place and put it near his head. Then he lay down there.

12 He dreamed and saw a raised staircase, its foundation on earth and its top touching the sky, and God's messengers were ascending and descending on it. **13** Suddenly the Lord was standing on it^[a]

and saying, "I am the Lord, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac. I will give you and your descendants the land on which you are lying.

14 Your descendants will become like the dust of the earth; you will spread out to the west, east, north, and south. Every family of earth will be blessed because of you and your descendants. **15** I am with you now, I will protect you everywhere you go, and I will bring you back to this land. I will not leave you until I have done everything that I have promised you."

16 When Jacob woke from his sleep, he thought to himself,

The Lord is definitely in this place, but I didn't know it. **17** He was terrified and thought, This sacred place is awesome. It's none other than God's house and the entrance to heaven.

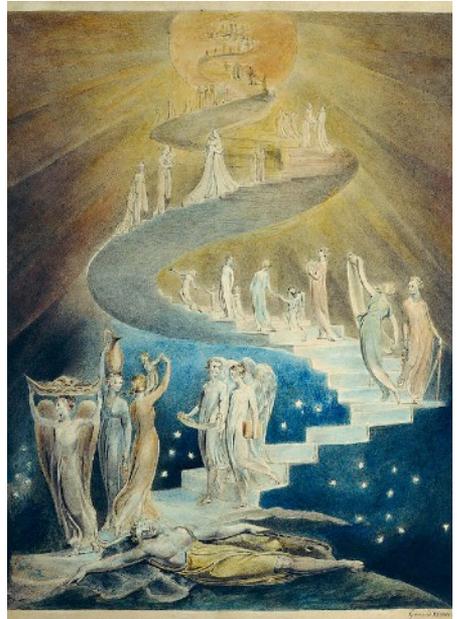
18 After Jacob got up early in the morning, he took the stone that he had put near his head, set it up as a sacred pillar, and poured oil on the top of it.

19 He named that sacred place Bethel...^[b]

Footnotes:

Genesis 28:13 Or "beside it" or "beside him"

Genesis 28:19 Or "God's house"



- What do make of God's promise, especially in v.15? Is Jacob deserving of this protection or is his destiny wrapped up in more than just his fate alone?
- Notice God says the same thing he has said to Abraham and Isaac in v.14: "your descendants..." They, not Jacob would realize God's promise ultimately. Is there a lesson here for us as a church? For us as individuals of faith?
- So what is Jacob's destiny? God's promise or the struggle that is to come (or both)?

Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43

Parable of the weeds

24 Jesus told them another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like someone who planted good seed in his field.

25 While people were sleeping, an enemy came and planted weeds among the wheat and went away. **26** When the stalks sprouted and bore grain, then the weeds also appeared.

27 "The servants of the landowner came and said to him, 'Master, didn't you plant good seed in your field? Then how is it that it has weeds?'

28 "'An enemy has done this,' he answered.

"The servants said to him, 'Do you want us to go and gather them?'

29 "But the landowner said, 'No, because if you gather the weeds, you'll pull up the wheat along with them. **30** Let both grow side by side until the harvest. And at harvesttime I'll say to the harvesters, "First gather the weeds and tie them together in bundles to be burned. But bring the wheat into my barn.'" "

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

"Cares are thorns to the poor; wealth to the rich; the desire of other things to all."

—John Wesley

"Whom God loves, he never leaves."

—Matthew Henry



Explanation of the parable of the weeds

36 Jesus left the crowds and went into the house. His disciples came to him and said, "Explain to us the parable of the weeds in the field."

37 Jesus replied, "The one who plants the good seed is the Human One.^[a] **38** The field is the world. And the good seeds are the followers of the kingdom. But the weeds are the followers of the evil one. **39** The enemy who planted them is the devil. The harvest is the end of the present age. The harvesters are the angels. **40** Just as people gather weeds and burn them in the fire, so it will be at the end of the present age. **41** The Human One^[b] will send his angels, and they will gather out of his kingdom all things that cause people to fall away and all people who sin. **42** He will throw them into a burning

furnace. People there will be weeping and grinding their teeth. **43** Then the righteous will shine like the sun in their Father's kingdom. Those who have ears should hear."

Footnotes:

Matthew 13:37 Or "Son of Man"

Matthew 13:41 Or "Son of Man"

- Who does the planting? Who are the harvesters?
- Who are the good seeds? Who are the weeds? How often are you either?
- Is this parable a premonition or a warning? Is it future-telling or a way to draw attention to better living, better choice-making?

Reflection on Genesis by Esther Men

http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=2143

Jacob's surprising encounter with God at Bethel leads to reflection about where we as individuals and as congregations meet God unexpectedly on life's journey.

In Genesis 28:10-19a, God appears to Jacob en route, as he escapes from his brother Esau's hatred (Genesis

27:41-45). Jacob, always a “schemer” and “usurper” (meanings of this Hebrew name), has stolen the birthright (Genesis 25:29-34) and the blessing (Genesis 27:1-40) belonging to Esau as Isaac’s firstborn.

Jacob’s grasping for status within the family results also in danger and separation, since to save his life he must leave behind even his beloved mother Rebekah. Jacob’s flight from the southern city of Beer Sheba to the northern city of Haran seems to reverse the celebrated journey of his grandparents Abraham and Sarah, who traveled in faith from their homeland in Haran to the land that God promised their descendants (Genesis 12:1-9).

Mid-journey, at a site chosen because of nightfall, Jacob has an extraordinary dream that changes his life. His dream discloses the hidden yet active presence of God at this chance stop along the way. God’s ongoing engagement in the world and in Jacob’s disrupted life is portrayed through a striking vision of stairs reaching from earth to heaven. This



“Like Jacob, in the face of God's free gift we too often grudgingly give God a crumb or two and imagine we are then God's follower.”

–John C. Holbert

structure recalls the stepped ziggurat or mud-brick mountain uniting heaven and earth prominent in Mesopotamian cities such as Babylon, a city whose name means “gate of the gods.” In Genesis God appears not to royalty or priests, but to a terrified refugee.

A Jacob on the move encounters a vision full of movement. Divine errand runners continually ascend and descend to do God's work in the world. Only the LORD appears stationed at the apex (reading the Hebrew 'alav in verse 13 as "above it," as in the KJV and NEB). Jacob is startled to recognize this place of God's indwelling as holy ground, as "the house of God" (the Hebrew meaning of "Bethel") and "the gate of heaven" (verse 17). Consecrating his rock pillow as a commemorative pillar, Jacob fittingly names what will become the major Israelite shrine of Bethel. (See also Abraham's earlier calling on the name of the LORD at an altar east of Bethel in Genesis 12:8.)

Jacob's dream is not only awe-inspiring and majestic, but also intimate and personal. In an alternative translation, God stands "beside him" (another reading of the Hebrew 'alav, as in the NRSV) as he lies on the ground, promising to be with him wherever he goes: "Know that I am with you and will keep you wherever you go" (verse 15). God's words at Bethel

initiate a covenant with Jacob, an enduring relationship committed to his well-being and future.

God's self-revelation with a personal name, the LORD (YHWH), grounds the covenant relationship with Jacob (verse 13). The very God who in earlier generations established a covenant with Abraham and Isaac now speaks with Jacob about an enduring connection extending to his descendants. Alone and in a strange place, Jacob becomes part of an intergenerational relationship with God. Promises of return to the particular land on which he lies, many descendants, and widespread blessing (verses 13-14) mark the abundance of this relationship.

Ordinary people are the means for God's widespread blessing. God announces that "all the families of the earth shall be blessed in you and in your offspring" (Genesis 28:14). Earlier Esau protests, "Have you only one blessing, father? Bless me, me also, father!" and weeps in frustration at being excluded (Genesis 27:38). The coveted blessing that destroy this family is countered with God's

alternative vision. Rather than a limited blessing won through defeat and humiliation of others, God extends a prodigal blessing to all the families of the earth through Jacob and his descendants.

Blessing will be as widespread as the "dust," the loose dirt that covers the ground in every direction and provides the thin layer of fertility sustaining all life on earth. Earlier promises compared descendants to stars



or sand (Genesis 15:5; 22:17; 26:4), emphasizing vast numbers. The humble imagery of topsoil adds an insight about the productivity of Jacob's

family as a means for God's blessing of all families. The ground's fertility is an especially compelling symbol of blessing in our age of environmental concern.

Jacob's concluding vow (Genesis 28:20-22) is not part of [of our selection]. This vow may cause discomfort since Jacob appears to be bargaining with God, requiring God to fulfill every promise before Jacob will acknowledge him at Bethel. This interpretation of Jacob's vow as a calculated set of conditions fits well with his character as a striver, one who prevails in his wrestling with humans and with God, to be given the new name "Israel" (Genesis 32:28).

A more charitable interpretation of Jacob's vow might view it as an appropriate response, since it is wise to test a subjective experience such as a dream. Questioning, doubt, and discernment are all part of the faith journey.

Another interpretation that attends more precisely to the grammar of the vow places the emphasis on Jacob's intention to return to Bethel, in

recognition of what God has done. Rather than setting conditions, Jacob simply paraphrases God's promises -- to be with him in the journey, to protect and provide for him in every way, to return him home finally (Genesis 28:15, 20-21) -- in other words, to act as Jacob's God.

The final conditional "if" clause of the vow in this interpretation consists of a summary, "if [in doing all these things] the LORD shall be my God," with the resulting "then" clauses beginning with "then this stone, which I have set up for a pillar, shall be God's house; and all that you give me I will surely give one-tenth to you" (Genesis 28:22).

Jacob's vow signals the importance of returning to the place where we encounter God most fully. Although Jacob continues on his journey to Haran, he remains oriented to Bethel, "the house of God," with plans to return for worship and thanksgiving. Jacob's descendants throughout the earth also hold this particular place as an orienting center. For Christians, Jacob's vow resonates with our weekly

returning from the journey of our daily lives to the place that we encounter God most fully through worship, word, and sacrament.

Reflection on Matthew by Warren Carter

http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=2073

After explaining the parable of the seed and different types of ground, Matthew's Jesus again employs an agricultural setting for the parable concerning weeds sown and growing among the wheat crop.

The audience seems to comprise both disciples, the audience for 13:18-23, and crowds (13:34, 36).

Jesus introduces the parable with a statement of comparison. The "empire of the heaven" is compared to the situation narrated in the parable (13:24). This introduction directs the audience to think about the following, unusual rather than familiar, agricultural situation as providing insight into the workings of God's empire among human beings.

The parable's scenario is initially similar to that of the previous parable in that it involves a sower sowing seed (13:3-9). The introduction stresses that this sower sows "good seed in his field." We subsequently learn that this sower is a person of some wealth and status, a "householder" who owns slaves and land (13:27). That he would be sowing his own field rather than his slaves is unusual. This is the first of several atypical dimensions in the parable that function to gain the audience's attention, to impart insight, and to prepare for the subsequent interpretation.



As with the previous parable, the seed experiences difficulties. This time, the difficulties involve not the types of ground on which it falls, but the actions of an enemy person. "While everyone was asleep," this enemy sows different seed, namely weeds or literally the

common and poisonous "darnel," among the wheat (13:25). Just how such an action requiring much seed and during the night, is possible is not questioned. Slaves report to their owner or "Master" - the wealthy "householder" who owns land and slaves -- the presence of the weeds growing among the wheat (13:27).

Further unrealistic features appear in the story. The owner somehow knows that an enemy has sown the darnel among the wheat, rather than recognizing that darnel is a common plant that inevitably grows most places (13:28). And when the slaves propose removing the

darnel from the field (the usual practice), the owner tells them to leave the wheat and the weeds growing together until harvest time (13:29-30).

These unusual agricultural practices draw our attention to these dimensions of the parable and their subsequent

interpretation about God's empire. At verses 30-31, Matthew's Jesus ends the parable and immediately begins another. In fact, he tells two more parables before offering an interpretation of the wheat and the weeds. He is prompted to do so by the disciples (13:36).

Jesus' interpretation treats most of the parable as an allegory. He draws one-on-one correspondences between aspects of the parable and dimensions of the empire of the heavens that he manifests among human beings. As in the parable of the sower, he identifies the sower as himself, the Son of Man. The activity of sowing depicts his ministry of proclaiming and demonstrating (in healings and exorcisms for example) the presence of God's empire or saving presence (1:21-23; 4:17). Jesus has also been identified previously as a householder or "master of the house" (10:25, the same word), as "Master" or Lord (8:2, 6, 8; 12:8), and as having slaves, an image for his disciples (10:24-25).

Jesus has identified himself previously as the Son of Man in

relation to his itinerant lifestyle (8:20) and his determination of how to honor the Sabbath (12:8). In this parable, verse 41 indicates that Son of Man denotes Jesus' role as the eschatological judge. This dimension of the Son of Man reflects the figure of Daniel 7:13-14 whom God appoints as an agent of God's purposes and rule after ending the empires of the world. The evoking of this tradition here puts his "sowing" activity and its impact into the perspective of the final judgment and end of the world's empires. This dimension was missing from the earlier parable in 13:3-9.



The field where Jesus sows is identified as “the world,” the realm of everyday political, economic, social, and religious life dominated by Roman imperial power. Jesus’ activity invades this sphere of empire to sow “good seed” concerning another empire (“the word about the empire” 13:19). In its midst, he forms a distinct community. This community comprises “the children of the empire” who live lives shaped by God’s empire and committed to doing the will of God (12:50).

But this community lives in contested space and is set in antithetical relation to those identified as “children of the evil one,” sown by the enemy, the devil (13:38-39). They coexist until “the harvest ... the end of the age.” In the judgment the Son of Man divides “the righteous” from “all causes of sin and evildoers” (particularly the Jerusalem-based leaders who resist Jesus). He burns the weeds, and the righteous enjoy an existence marked by light and life, God’s saving presence (4:15-16). The parable ends with the familiar appeal to

discern the significance of Jesus’ words and live appropriately in the present toward this future.

While the parable’s symbolism is readily accessible, some interpreters are rightly disturbed by its analysis and implications. For example, the parable’s presentation of two antithetical types of plants presents a view of human beings that hardly reflects the complexity of human life.

While some readily divide the world neatly into “Christians” (the righteous) and “non-Christians” (evildoers), both the Gospel and our experience tell us that such categories are fluid, co-existent, and difficult to discern at best. Most of us, including churchgoers, comprise both plant-types and are not “purely” one or the other. In 12:50, Jesus declared his family to comprise those who do “the will of my Father in heaven,” a descriptor that might embrace a wide and surprising variety of people.

Labeling people as children of the devil hardly facilitates our recognizing all people as bearing the image of God. The

parable warns us that now is not the time to be presuming to know final outcomes. Nor can we forget that God's infinite and indiscriminate mercy -- celebrated in 5:45 -- plays little place in the parable.



Additional Thoughts

- Do you believe or think God predetermines who will be "good" and who will be "bad"? How do you imagine God's knowledge of all things and our free will coexist?
- What do you think is God's destiny for us as a church? Where do you think we are actually headed? What role do you think you are playing in the destiny of our congregation?

