

# MINISTER'S MESSAGE

SUNDAY, JULY 12, 2020

KNOX PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

## "Between a Rock and a Hard Place!"

Based on Genesis 28:10-19

The sun was setting. The air was cooling quickly. He would have to sleep. But he had left in such a hurry, he had nothing.

No blanket. No food.

No firestarter.

He might have been the perfect candidate for an episode of Naked and Afraid or Alone (again, watching too much reality television during COVID), but Jacob was in trouble. With no other option, he took a smooth rock, imagined it to be a soft pillow filled with fresh grass, and fell into a deep sleep born out of too much sun, too much drama, and too much adrenaline from his escape.

Jacob had been a very bad boy. And it shouldn't be too much of a surprise, that once again, our minds are drawn into the desert:

A place of banishment, a place to hide, a place to die, a place to escape.

The fact that Jacob slept with a rock for a pillow tells you that he left town in a hurry, and that this was no summer vacation he was taking.

Jacob had always been his Mother's favourite. But that was alright. Because his older brother Esau had always been his father's favourite. But as pampered by his Mother as the scripture infers Jacob was, he could never seem to get past the jealousy of wanting *more*; being *more* than the back-up son in his Father's eyes, greedy for *more* than second hand left overs of the family fortune. And as his Father grew old and frail, and his eyesight weakened, a plan began to take shape.

With some guile and disguise and persuasion, Jacob convinced his ailing Father to extend the family inheritance, the birthright, to him, rather than Esau. This was no small thing. This was the official passing of the torch to the next generation, and age-old tradition firmly entrenched in the biblical society of the day. This was a very bad thing that Jacob had done.

- It defiled the laws of the day.
- It disgraced the family honour.
- It pitted brother against brother.

And barely was the ink dry on the parchment before Esau returned home to

discover that the rug had been pulled out from under him.

I don't think I need to tell you what happened next. Jacob ran for his life. There was only one place to hide: the desert. We can only imagine what other baggage Jacob carried with him as he made his way across the hot sand. Jacob was a man whose heart was weighted down with anger and resentment and jealousy that clouded his judgment, and made it difficult to experience contentment in small things, or glimpses of glory in the everyday. It is important to note that as Jacob slept and was given this vision of a ladder, he slept as a troubled man, guilty of malicious actions and dark thoughts, a man fully exposed as he slept to the will of God.

So about that ladder.

"I wonder," Jacob thought as he woke, "Does that ladder reaching into the heavens mean that each time I do something good, or right, or with the right intention, that I move one step closer to YHWH? That if I do enough right things, than I can get to heaven? Or does the ladder mean that life is a journey of ups and downs, and depending on the choices I

make that I can get closer or further away from YHWH?"

Jacob awoke from his dream, more confused than rested. He knew an important message had been given to him, but thinking it through was difficult when he was cold, and tired, and hungry. Then he remembered YHWH's words from the dream:

*I am with you and will watch over you wherever you go, and I will bring you back to this land. I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you." (v15)*

Jacob was a little afraid. But he was also a little awed.

*"Surely the LORD is in this place, and I was not aware of it." (v16)*

Jacob realized, "I am a troubled man and have done terrible things. Yet YHWH still extended the ladder to me." And in that moment, Jacob made the decision to turn his life around, to start over, to put the pieces back together again, to take responsibility for his mistakes and mis-steps, but to not let them be an excuse to not take the first steps on the ladder to a new life and a new relationship with YHWH.

My friends, much of the discussion over the last two weeks as I was studying with clergy from all over North America was, "**How do we put church back together again after COVID?**" Because

the difficult truth is that we simply cannot start doing again, what we were doing in February.

- Too many things have changed.
- We have changed.
- Safety protocols have changed.
- The community around us has changed.

As we consider how and when to re-open our building, we find ourselves with more questions than answers. *And fear travels quietly with those questions.*

**We** know that worship is going to have to look different.

**We** know that we will have to be careful how many people can be in our building.

**We** know we are going to have to look thoughtfully at other groups who use our building during that week. *And fear travels quietly with those decisions.*

**We** think we are caught: between a rock and a hard place.

But know this.

Whatever worship eventually looks like...

**Whatever** hoops we will need to jump through to keep everyone safe...

**Whatever** things we have to stop doing...

**Whatever** things we will have to start doing...

**Whatever** changes we face...

*"Surely the LORD is in this place, and I was not aware of it."*

If our plans for Knox, and our experiments with new ideas and technology, and our graceful letting go of old ways is done with sincere hearts and willing spirits, then, "Surely the LORD is in this place", and in our attempts and in our plans.

YHWH promised Jacob, that he would never leave him, that His promise would be fulfilled. Furthermore, YHWH promised Jacob that he would become prosperous for his efforts; that he would succeed in his future endeavours. And he did.

Our God says to us:

*I am with you and will watch over you wherever you go, and I will bring you back to this land. I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you."*

**Knox** is re-energizing.

**Knox** is preparing.

**Knox** is re-thinking how we do things, but we're stepping up to the plate, and getting ready.

No more rocks in hard places, here. We're almost ready to rumble.

*Surely the Lord is in this place.* Are you aware of it?

Amen.