

MINISTER'S MESSAGE

SUNDAY, JULY 19, 2026

KNOX PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

"The Goodness of God"

Based on Genesis 28:10-19

I do not tell this story often, as it still smarts. But you've likely heard me tell it before. Almost thirty years ago now, I made my way into a new chapter of life as a single parent getting ready to start Seminary. I met a high school chum in the local grocery store. In the course of conversation, I shared with him my new situation and mentioned I was headed back to school to become a Minister.

His reply: "I can't imagine the school allowing someone like you into a place like that!" And before my anger and anguish could collide into tears in the middle of the lettuce, I replied, "Yes, imagine that, a sinner like me!"

What about a sinner like Jacob?

But of course, the answer is yes! We know, as Paul Harvey would say, the rest of the story. We heard today about the vision, the ladder, and the voice of God repeating the

same promises to Jacob as He had given to his grandfather, Abraham. If we were to read ahead, we would be reminded that Jacob would, in time, father Joseph, the man with the technicolor dream coat that made him famous on Broadway thousands of years later

But this Jacob is also the same man, who betrayed his brother, tricked his dying father into giving him the family fortune, and now rushed out of town in the dark of night by his nagging mother. Not exactly the most auspicious beginning of a biblical hero.

At this point in Jacob's story, I can see little of God or goodness in his soul. He wanted the money, the power over his brother, and the prestige of the family honour, but he did not want to do the work to earn it, nor was willing to give the dignity of respect the birthright afforded. He stole it. And then he ran for his life, in fear of what his brother's rage might evolve into.

"And oh by the way," said his mother, as she lifted the corner of the tent and handed

him food and water to sustain him while he ran, "Find yourself a wife along the way. Not one of those local women, but a 'good' woman from back home." Now that was one action packed adventure.

- Hide from your brother,
- Avoid death in the desert,
- Bring a wife home when the dust settles.

"Sure, Mom, no problem!"

Jacob ran until he could run no more. He couldn't stay in town, or anywhere he might be seen or recognized. So, in the cold of the desert night, he laid his head down upon a rock. Perhaps for the first time in his life, he was alone.

- No mother to helicopter parent.
- No father to please.
- No brother to bother.

Just himself, looking at himself. And in the quiet, and in the inky blackness of the night, one wonders if he liked what he saw. I suspect not.

In a dream he saw angels ascending and descending a ladder, with God at the top.

- Angels ascending to receive new orders and share Good News.

- Angels descending with tasks to complete, and people to assist.

In the morning, Jacob was a changed man, with a new goal and a new plan. He would serve God. He would repay back the earthly things he stole. But more important, he would give of himself, his energy, his intelligence, and his ability. He would give back to the world what in the past, he had simply taken, without thought or care.

So there's the warm fuzzy ending we were looking for. God is good. Jacob is now one of God's people, with a Godly purpose. Neat and tidy.

But here's the kicker. It's easy to rest in the thought that Jacob listened to God, trusted in the promise and moved forward in faith and in purpose with God's wisdom by his side. Doesn't that sound lovely?

But what about the Jacob before the vision.

What about Jacob the sinner.

Jacob, a man who had obviously done some very bad and morally reprehensible things was blessed by a vision from God.

- Surely there was a better person to have received such a gift as a vision from God.
- Surely God could have found a less sinful person, a more Christ-

like person to bestow such a blessing, you know...good Christian folk.

We believe that God uses Christian men and women and children to bring glory to His name and His purposes. But can we believe that God uses unbelieving men and women and children, who have never heard the stories from the Bible, to bring that same glory to His name and His purposes?

Now I tread carefully here.

As a child of God, I understand that one of the purposes of my Christian walk, is to encourage others to also come and know the Saviour. And I am fully aware that there are many different understandings of what it means to be 'saved' and who, and under what circumstances, one may be welcomed through the gates of heaven.

But what about everyone else out there in the world that does not yet, have a committed life to Christ? Are they welcomed by God, or only welcomed if they are 'saved?' I know what my 'Book of Doctrine' says, but I find it a difficult question, and I don't think I have a ready answer that satisfies.

Some would say that without the exact moment and time and day of salvation

clearly in mind, one is doomed to an eternity of hell and damnation.

Some would say they have lived through times of heaven and hell right here on earth.

Some would say that any sense of the divine is good enough.

The truth is, we could debate doctrine well through until supper and not be any further ahead. And since I have not yet arrived at the pearly gates myself, I cannot report one way or the other with certainty.

But Jacob's story shows us a God that was working through a sinful man, before he believed, and after he came to believe. Abraham's story was continuing to unfold despite some of the meanest, dirtiest tricks families could do to one another.

God did not bless the trickery. But God did bless the men and the women who moved His story forward. God continues to bless, both sinners and saints, and everyone in between.

Because God sees the goodness inside.

Because God sees the potential inside.

Because God can see more than you or I can see or understand.

And so rather than say, "You're in!" or "You're out," God says, 'Come closer. Let me show you another way.' Amen.