

The Second Sunday in Lent
March 8, 2009
Amazing Grace Lutheran - Pastor Chip Wilke

Genesis 28:10-17

Jacob left Beersheba and set out for Haran. When he reached a certain place, he stopped for the night because the sun had set. Taking one of the stones there, he put it under his head and lay down to sleep. He had a dream in which he saw a stairway resting on the earth, with its top reaching to heaven, and the angels of God were ascending and descending on it. There above it stood the LORD, and he said: "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. Your descendants will be like the dust of the earth, and you will spread out to the west and to the east, to the north and to the south. All peoples on earth will be blessed through you and your offspring. 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." When Jacob awoke from his sleep, he thought, "Surely the LORD is in this place, and I was not aware of it." He was afraid and said, "How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God; this is the gate of heaven." (NIV)

Has life ever knocked you down and taken the wind out of your sails? Have you ever been uncertain or afraid? Have you ever felt lonely or troubled? Have you ever needed to be refreshed? Have you ever been refreshed when you least expected it? You get a bad grade on a test and the teacher asks to see you after class. Then surprisingly the teacher pats you on the back and says: "Keep working at it. You are a bright kid and I know you can get it." That child walks away refreshed. You have relationships that are torn apart, someone you hurt, but then they come to you out of the blue and tell you: "I forgive you. I still love you." You walk away refreshed. You are hurting and sad and lonely, and then someone we might not expect, maybe someone you don't even know that well in your church family gives you a hug and reminds you: "I am here for you. We are praying for you and your family." That refreshes us.

Today, we see someone that is in need of being refreshed. We see someone who finds comfort in an unexpected place. We see someone shown amazing love who doesn't deserve it. We realize this is true not only for Jacob, but for us as well. Today, I pray we marvel at **God's Refreshing Grace. God's refreshing grace (1) pours out promises to cheer us (2) offers guidance to steer us.**

You may recall Jacob was the grandson of Abraham & the son of Isaac. He also had an older twin brother named Esau. Yet, God had promised the birthright to the younger Jacob. Do you remember what happened? Jacob and his mother Rebekah didn't trust in God to fulfill this promise. Jacob tricked Esau and lied to his father Isaac to get the blessing. Now Esau was angry and plotting to kill Jacob. So Jacob flees not just to find a wife but to escape from Esau's wrath. Jacob is traveling to Haran about 500 miles away. He is a fugitive, a lonely traveler, uncertain and afraid, and guilty as sin.

Just imagine the thoughts running through Jacob's mind as he grabs a rock for a pillow and lays down his head. Would he ever see his family again? Would Esau kill him? Would he find a wife and have children? How would God punish him? We can

only imagine what Jacob must of been feeling as he falls asleep alone. But as He sleeps we read: ***“He had a dream in which he saw a stairway resting on the earth, with its top reaching to heaven, and the angels of God were ascending and descending on it. There above it stood the LORD, and he said: ‘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. Your descendants will be like the dust of the earth, and you will spread out to the west and to the east, to the north and to the south. All peoples on earth will be blessed through you and your offspring.’”***

What a vision! Think about the circumstances. What does this all mean? Three times Moses uses a word that really doesn’t show up in the English. It is a word often translated *“behold.”* It calls attention to something totally unexpected. Here we might say Jacob was dreaming and behold a staircase! - behold angels! - behold the LORD Himself! Jacob beholds angels going up and down this staircase that reached from heaven to the earth where he was resting and above it all stood the LORD - the name emphasizing the God of free and faithful love. What do you call it when God has every reason to annihilate you and no reason to bless you, but He blesses you anyway? What do you call it when God comes in love to somebody who doesn’t at all deserve it? We call that grace. The Lord refreshes Jacob with His grace.

The Lord does so by pouring out His promises to cheer him. The Lord reaffirms the covenant of grace He made with Abraham at the very same place. The Lord comes to Jacob who barely has anything but the clothes on his back and says: *“I’m going to turn this whole land into your country.”* He says to Jacob who is fleeing for his life and doesn’t even have a wife or son yet, *“Your descendants will be like the dust of the earth.”* He says to this sinner who deserves punishment and eternal death: *“From your offspring will come the deliverer of all people, your deliverer, through whom all nations will be blessed.”* The Lord refreshes Jacob with His grace by cheering Jacob with His promises.

The Lord does the same for us. Like Jacob our hearts our filled with greed, our lips speak lies, and our lives show a lack of trust in God’s promises. Yet, God comes to us and loves us even with we don’t deserve it. Talk about something unexpected listen to the words of our epistle this morning. ***“You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly...God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”*** The reason God didn’t just annihilate Jacob or us, the reason he blesses Jacob and us, is because of Jesus. God spent all His anger at our sinfulness on His Son when He cursed Jesus during the crucifixion. Now what is left for us is love, love that we don’t deserve, love that we have to call grace. God cheers us with promises of forgiveness, blessings, and life eternal. When we are flat on our backs in the hospital, when we are lonely or uncertain, when we are hurting, when we are burdened by our sin and guilt, God comes with His promises in Christ Jesus.

Jesus quotes this verse saying that heaven will open and angels will ascend and descend on Him. Jesus is our stairway to God. Jesus repaired our relationship with God, He reconciled us and by His cross makes peace with God and us. Sinners in fellowship with the Lord - this unexpected thing is the beautiful picture of this dream. God is here for Jacob: ***“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.”***

God will guide Jacob and bless Jacob and go with Jacob every step of the way through life.

God does the same for us. The Lord will never leave us or forsake us. We walk with Jesus all the way. His Word is here to guide us, His help is here to shelter us, and His arms are here to comfort us. You are never alone! Because Jesus gave His life for you, because Jesus redeemed you, because Jesus lived and died and rose again for you, you are God's own dear child. Wherever you are or however you have messed up your life, your prayer requests in Jesus' name reach your Father in heaven. The Lord washes your sins away in Jesus' blood. God sends His angels to watch over you. The Lord works things for your good - all things. The Lord will not leave you until He gives you the heaven He promised.

Think again of Jacob. He was running away from home. He had come to a place where all he has is a rock for a pillow. He had no friends - no family. He was uncertain and afraid. He was all alone. Now enter God's grace. Does this grace refresh Jacob? Listen - *"When Jacob awoke from his sleep, he thought, 'Surely the LORD is in this place, and I was not aware of it.' He said, 'How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God; this is the gate of heaven.'"*

Knowing that the Lord is with us here and everywhere we are able to say the same thing! How awesome is the place where the Lord dwells! How awesome it is to know that the Lord is with us always and Jesus is our gate to heaven. How awesome it is to know God's grace, the undeserved love God has for us in Jesus. I pray that grace refreshes us as God pours out His promises to cheer us and continues to offer His guidance to steer us. I pray like Jacob, we respond with worship & praise & thanks & trust.

I would like to conclude by reading a poem that I keep in my desk written by an unknown author. This poem reminds me that, like Jacob, I have a God who is always with me. This poem encourages me to turn to His Word daily to hear His promises that will never fail me, and to keep my eyes on my Savior whose love never leaves me. **"God has not promised skies always blue, Flower- strewn pathways all our lives through. God has not promised sun without rain, joy without sorrow, peace without pain. But God has promised strength for the day, rest from the labor, light for the way; grace for the trials, help from above, unfailing sympathy, undying love."** May God's grace refresh you, my friends, for His mercies are new every morning! Amen.