

St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church

traditional land of the Three Fires Confederacy: the Odawa, Potawatami and Ojibwe.

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Worship This Week March 17, 2024

SCRIPTURE – Let's recap last week's saga of the broken family. Rebekah and Jacob had just deceived Isaac and Esau. Mother against son and his father, Wife against Husband, brother against brother. It was a fine mess. Rather than fix it they went into damage control. No confession. Rebekah convinced Isaac to send Jacob off to the land of their ancestry to find a wife. The hope was for a few days until Esau cooled off. In reality, it would be more like 20 years. This family started out so well. But now the chosen son and heir is heading for the hills, the other son wants to kill him but there's no remorse from either parent. The family started out as a masterpiece but became a fine mess when they took their eyes off the Master. No one gave God the glory. Let's continue the story.

Read Genesis 28:10-22 – Meanwhile, Jacob left Beersheba and traveled toward Haran. 11 At sundown he arrived at a good place to set up camp and stopped there for the night. Jacob found a stone to rest his head against and lay down to sleep. 12 As he slept, he dreamed of a stairway that reached from the earth up to heaven. And he saw the angels of God going up and down the stairway. 13 At the top of the stairway stood the Lord, and he said, "I am the Lord, the God of your grandfather Abraham, and the God of your father, Isaac. The ground you are lying on belongs to you. I am giving it to you and your descendants. 14 Your descendants will be as numerous as the dust of the earth! They will spread out in all directions—to the west and the east, to the north and the south. And all the families of the earth will be blessed through you and your descendants. 15 What's more, I am with you, and I will protect you wherever you go. One day I will bring you back to this land. I will not leave you until I have finished giving you everything I have promised you."

16 Then Jacob awoke from his sleep and said, "Surely the Lord is in this place, and I wasn't even aware of it!" 17 But he was also afraid and said, "What an awesome place this is! It is none other than the house of God, the very gateway to heaven!"

18 The next morning Jacob got up very early. He took the stone he had rested his head against, and he set it upright as a memorial pillar. Then he poured olive oil over it. 19 He named that place Bethel (which means "house of God"), although it was previously called Luz. 20 Then Jacob made this vow: "If God will indeed be with me and protect me on this journey, and if he will provide me with food and clothing, 21 and if I return safely to my father's home, then the Lord will certainly be my God. 22 And this memorial pillar I have set up will become a place for worshiping God, and I will present to God a tenth of everything he gives me."

MESSAGE – Even when we make a mess of things, God refuses to give up on us. In this tragic story, everyone lost. Each of the main characters — Isaac, Rebekah, Esau, and Jacob — schemed and maneuvered in human wisdom and energy, rejecting God's word and wisdom. But all of this was on a human level. In the Kingdom, something else was happening. Despite what we do, God still accomplishes His purpose.

Jacob is now on the road, beginning a 500 mile trek to Haran with an uncertain future. The first few days of the journey would have been filled with fear and anxiety. Despite his father's blessing, which was half-hearted, for all Jacob knew his brother could have been right on his tail. He was living in total fear. Today's scripture finds him at Bethel, which was three days into his journey. He had no idea that God would meet him there.

On that night, Jacob had a dream. A ladder was set up on the earth, and its top reached to heaven; and there the angels of God were ascending and descending on it. In the dream, there was now access to heaven. Jacob now knew God was closer than he ever thought before and there was real access and interaction between heaven and earth. This was a powerful image. It's inspired artists throughout the centuries. [Five images on three slides.] It revealed a God who was not in a heavenly fortress. Rather, his spirit and power was on the move. There was a constant movement of angels coming and going. God was actively at work not only in heaven but also on earth. This is a hint of what was to come when Jesus declared: "I tell you the truth, you will all see heaven open and the angels of God going up and down on the Son of Man, the one who is the stairway between heaven and earth." (John 1:51). Jesus Messiah is the ladder. Jesus is the way to heaven. He does not show us a way; He is the way. Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me" (John 14:6). Further evidence that Jesus was alive and well and showing up throughout the Old Testament.

And then God spoke to Jacob. I am the LORD God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac." Jacob had no doubt heard about the great God who appeared to Abraham and to Isaac, but now this same God met Jacob in a personal way. This was a life-changing experience for Jacob. "The land on which you lie I will give to you and your descendants." These words were for comfort and hope to Jacob at this critical crossroads in his life. Essentially, God repeated to Jacob the terms of the covenant He gave to Abraham in Genesis 12:2-3: "I will make you into a great nation. I will bless you and make you famous, and you will be a blessing to others. 3 I will bless those who bless you and curse those who treat you with contempt. All the families on earth will be blessed through you" and to Isaac in Genesis 26:2-5: "Live here as a foreigner in this land, and I will be with you and bless you. I hereby confirm that I will give all these lands to you and your descendants, just as I solemnly promised Abraham, your father. 4 I will cause your descendants to become as numerous as the stars of the sky, and I will give them all these lands. And through your descendants all the nations of the earth will be blessed. 5 I will do this because Abraham listened to me and obeyed all my requirements, commands, decrees, and instructions." God confirmed what He had told Jacob's father and grandfather. And what a powerful promise it was. "I am with you, and I will protect you wherever you go. One day I will bring you back to this land. I will not leave you until I have finished giving you everything I have promised you." God is good on His word. When He speaks, we can be confident. If God begins something, He will see it to completion. God won't let us go until His work is complete in us. "I am with you": This is a powerful blessing. Notice how it's spoken in the present tense. Am with you. Not I will be, one day, be patient. No – right here and now.

Jacob was a changed man – renewed and confident. "Surely the Lord is in this place, and I wasn't even aware of it!" Jacob was right in sensing the presence of the LORD there. If he thought that God was in some places but not in others, he was wrong. As King David would say

many centuries later, “Where can I go from Your Spirit? Or where can I flee from Your presence? (Psalm 139:7). At the same time, he was filled with respect. The Biblical author says he was “afraid.” Fear in this context is not being frightened but about being totally taken aback and standing in awe of something in total submission. In this state, Jacob was thinking: “What an awesome place this is! It is none other than the house of God, the very gateway to heaven!” He called that place Bethel. God can be everywhere, but some places are sacred. The city of Bethel would play an important role in Israel’s history: it is second only to Jerusalem in the number of times mentioned in the Old Testament. As if to remind Jacob of his words of promise and reassurance in Genesis 28, God later, when speaking to Jacob, God referred to Himself as the God of Bethel (Genesis 31:13).

The Lord did not rebuke Jacob for participating in Rebekah’s scheme. He moved on to the present. Unlike human nature, with all of its baggage, God does not dwell in the past. His yoke is easy and His burden is light. He is the God of hope. It’s important to note what Jacob did in response. He set up a memorial and worshiped. He vowed his allegiance to God. And he pledged to give 10 per cent of everything God gives him back to God.

“The LORD of Heaven’s Armies is here among us; the God of Jacob is our fortress.” (Psalm 46:7) Jacob would not have an easy life. God knew what was in store. (We’ll be getting into all of that in the weeks to come following Easter.) But God promised to be with him. And God keeps His promises. And Jacob – who was a changed man after this encounter – lived in faith with that assurance. Still not perfect. But out of his marriages we would get the tribes of Israel – and from one of those tribes came the Messiah. The fortress of the God of Jacob remains standing. The forces of darkness are powerful and look terrifying, but they will not prevail if we keep our eyes fixed upon the Lord. He is our strength when we are weak. This is our Blessed Assurance.

HYMN – 687 Blessed Assurance

NEW PRAYER

1. Bruce Stephens surgery on March 18 to alleviate pain from the sarcoma.
2. Discernment as we review the applications which are coming in for the church admin job.
3. May the latest monthly Gospel display ad in The Herald and the weekly scripture in The Coffee Times reach people who need the Lord.

CONTINUE TO PRAY

Health and healing –

1. Ellen Robinson – continued healing and strength from the loss of her husband Doug.
2. Colin Paterson, radiation therapy for prostate cancer
3. Cindy Brewer’s friend Kelly, who has cancer, and friend Linda, whose husband Dennis also has cancer.
4. For all those recovering from surgical procedures.
5. Betty and Bruce Bradley, Becky Desjardine, Margaret Follows, Ron Mason, Bette Northcott, Karen Northcott, Tom O’Neill, Cherie Pegg, Sandra Pegg, Julie Shaw, Sandra Whitson

6. Anyone seeking or undergoing treatment for addictions
7. Anyone wrestling with anxiety and depression

Seniors on the move – Jerome Ide moving to the Oaks. Park Street Place residents moving out to new homes.

Shut ins – Dianne Richards at Wallaceburg Retirement Residence, Jim Lusk at Oaks Wallaceburg, Lane Douglas and Ross Fuchs at Fairfield Park in Wallaceburg, Aubrey Butler at home.

Elders on session – Mark Labadie 519-359-4842, Cindy Brewer 519-683-4113, Sheila Eves 519-683-4148, Andrew Neely 519-359-8903, Mark Richards 519-809-9175 and Julie Shaw 226-627-1953, Bob Vriesema 519-401-8056.

Board of managers – Wendy Weston (chair), Levi Bergsma, Will Brewer, Linda Malott, Jenn Mason, Nicole Neely, Von Parking, Mark Richards, Jodie Rich, Bob Vriesema and Mike Wicks.

DATES

March 17 – 7 p.m. Ministerial Celebration of Praise service at Dresden Christian Reformed Church. It will be a night of worship featuring a collective worship team from the Sarnia area.

March 18 – 7 p.m. Board of Managers meeting

March 20 – Noon. Lenten Lunch at North Dresden Baptist Church. Speaker Pastor Phil Sabine of Charlemont Free Methodist.

March 20 – 7 p.m. Time of prayer at Dresden Community Church to seek the Lord's intervention regarding York1's plan to establish a recycling/disposal facility. After a short time of worship music, everyone will be invited to pray what God lays on your heart. "Sincere prayers of God's people have great power and produce wonderful results. Jesus tells us to ask, seek and knock. With God all things are possible."

March 23 – Doors open 8 a.m. A Men's Awakening – Chatham-Kent Men's Breakfast at Chatham Christian School. "Taking steps in faith to move out of the back pew." Matthew 14:29. RSVP ck316men@gmail.com

March 27 – Noon. Lenten Lunch at North Dresden Baptist Church. Speaker Fr. Chris P from St. Michael's RC Church.

March 29 – Good Friday cross walk 8:45 a.m. at Rotary Park Dresden and worship 10 a.m. at Evangel Pentecostal.

April 2 – 7 p.m. Session

April 6 – 1-4 p.m. open house at Park Street Place to celebrate all that it was. Former residents, family members and anyone in the community are welcome. RSVP to rec.parkstreetplace@gmail.com by March 31.

April 10 – 7 p.m. New Bible study begins at Evangel. 1 John (letter from John).

April 16 – 2 p.m. Heather Club meeting in the Fellowship Room. All ladies of the congregation are welcome to attend for an afternoon of good conversation and fellowship.