

## Stairway to heaven

A few years ago I preached on the Old Testament passage of what is known as Jacob's ladder. As you know I love music and even last week I spoke about some of the words in a song by Amy Grant. Today I want to pick up a song I have spoken about before but I think is still pretty relevant.

*There's a lady who's sure all that glitters is gold  
And she's buying a stairway to heaven.  
When she gets there she knows, if the stores are all closed  
With a word she can get what she came for.  
Ooh, ooh, and she's buying a stairway to heaven....  
Yes, there are two paths you can go by, but in the long run  
There's still time to change the road you're on.  
And it makes me wonder.*

These are just two sections of a song called stairway to heaven by Led Zeppelin. I love playing the music as there is a real haunting quality to it but the meaning of the words has caused a lot of debate in the past as well as in the present. As a Christian it has a particular meaning about our life choices, and it raises the question about where our paths will lead. I know we live in a world where money and power seem to thrive and the trickle-down economics from some governments just ensure that the rich get richer and the poor get poorer. Yet in this time of Covid 19 I am aware of how many people have taken the time to begin to re-evaluate their lives. Many are thinking about what really matters.

Over the last couple of weeks, we have been exploring something of the story of some key figures in the Old Testament as well as looking at a couple of psalms. We have heard a little of Isaac and the way Ishmael and his mother were cast out from Abraham's family. In Bible Study we have heard of Abraham's servant going and finding a wife for Isaac and the trust of Rebekah to travel back and become his wife. If you have been following the lectionary in your bible reading you would have read of the struggle Rebekah had with the twins fighting within her and the birth of Esau and Jacob. Esau, fresh from hunting came in hungry and sold his birthright being the eldest son, for red lentil stew which Jacob had cooked.

An important note was the last verse from last week- and Esau did not value his birthright.

Today we come across a story of Jacob in the wilderness place. In the scriptures he and Rebekah tricked Isaac and Jacob received Isaac's blessing, not Esau. When Esau finally realizes what his birthright meant and it was traded for a bowl of red lentil stew he is furious and wants to kill Jacob. So Jacob runs away.

Today we find him in a desert place- which for the bible means a lonely place outcast from society. Here he sleeps and uses a rock for his pillow. And it is here in the remnants of an ancient city called Luz that Jacob has a dream and discovers the incredible image of a ladder to heaven. He names that place Bethel- House of God.

And the stairway had angels going up and angels coming down. The message from God was one of promise and hope for the future- and an incredible blessing, far greater than that which his father Isaac had given him. And I love Jacob's response when he woke up.

'He was afraid and said 'how awesome is this place!'. My kids would be impressed. And for Jacob, he could never see the world the same way again. His world was opened up and his experience and knowledge of this world was changed forever.

Now you know I get interested by some of the stories in the Old Testament. The fact that he was an old city called Luz is rather interesting. According to of the one sites I visited on the computer, *the city of Luz it is an interdimensional city of higher consciousness that brings together branches of knowledge and experience.* That sounds like gobbledegook but it really means that Luz is coming together of what we know and what we experience.

The city was also difficult to breach except through a small cave behind a hazelnut tree- and the Hebrew word for hazelnut tree is .... Luz. Then to make it even more interesting- The word luz is a small bone in the spinal column which both Jews and Muslims believe is indestructible and will be used for the bodily resurrection of people in the end time.

So the concept of Jacob's ladder is about the connection of our life experience and the experience of being connected with God.

For Jacob, that experience helped him know with complete certainty that God was with him always and even when it did not make sense it would all work out.

The gospel reading is also interesting as it talks about the good seed and bad seed growing together in a field -alongside each other and even intertwined with each other. It talks about the workers wanting to weed out the bad plants but knowing that it would be OK in the end and that any 'judgement' side of things would be worked out- not by us, but by the harvesters who are angels. Somehow there is a link between the ladder in Jacob's dream and the concept of the end times of the harvest. And in both it is the angels who are coming and going and doing the work.

Just in case you haven't heard me say this before, I like all of you, are human and that means there are some wonderful things and some not so good things. There are people in this world we would name as 'bad' and yet when we point a finger at someone else we have 3 fingers pointing back at us. None of us are perfect.

But just like that song stairway to heaven says *Yes, there are two paths you can go by, but in the long run There's still time to change the road you're on.*

At the beginning of Covid I planted a large planter with some vegetables. They have grown significantly and some I have had to weed but others have been OK. One of the things from Matthew that is so true is the challenge that in removing the weeds, there is a high risk of disturbing the roots of the plants that are wanted.



I think that all of us are a little like Jacob. There are things we have done that may not have been right, and there are things that we do that are good and healthy. Yet we have both lying within us. We want to do the right thing but do not always do those things. Sometimes we end up doing the very thing we do not want to do. Paul has picked this up in the last few weeks in the reading from Romans which we have not looked at in worship but has been in the lectionary readings. We truly are a mixture of good plants and weeds. Even still, God's angels are with us, helping us and God's Spirit is always guiding us- helping us choose the better path.

My prayer for us all this week is to look at the world in a new way, just as Jacob did. That we can stop looking for the weeds and instead look at the ways we can help bring about a beautiful and wonderful harvest. And in the way we speak and live our lives we can make a difference to help people wonder- and that we might pray that they might discover the one way we know through Jesus Christ.