

Dear Friends,

GENESIS 28: 11-12

Jacob is still in a deserted, desolate place. He is leaving behind his family; the land of his birth, and maybe even God. Would that be a relief, to let go of God? Or would that be too much to lose? He feels as though he has lost everything. It's time for sleep. But he has nowhere to lay his head. Most translations tell us that he takes a stone and places it under his head. That must have been the least comfortable pillow ever. However, it could be that he puts the stone not "under" but "at" his head. In this barren, empty place he finds a large stone and lies down by its side because it gives him a little bit of protection.

Jacob has a thing about rocks and stones. We will see him wrestling them and using them throughout his story. Earlier we noticed that he lived in tents, which has been suggested was the women's space. I drew from that the thought that maybe Jacob was at home with the side of himself traditionally thought to be feminine. I still think that may be so. But he's also at home with the side of himself traditionally thought to be masculine. He can be hard like rock. He will move huge stones in great feats of strength. But all of that is for later. Now is the time for him to rest.

Eventually he sleeps. And when he does, what a dream! Earlier in Genesis, God appeared to people and they had conversations. But now God is branching out, using new ways of communicating. God speaks to Jacob through dreams and will continue to use that method to talk to others.

Jacob dreams of a ramp or stairway. It reaches to heaven. Earlier in Genesis, we heard of how people built the Tower of Babel. They wanted it to have its top in the heavens. But we from earth cannot build such a thing. What is impossible for us however is possible for God. Jacob's stairway comes down from heaven and reaches not just into the heavens but to heaven. What we strive to build for ourselves God wants to give us as a free gift.

Jacob when he wakes up will know that he has been at the gate of heaven. Stories often tell of a gateway, a narrow entrance through which all the comings and goings between earth and heaven take place. Jacob is at this place. It is a stairway, and on the stairs, there are the angels of God who are going up and coming down. They carry out God's commands. They oversee and supervise the earth. They take up the cries, longings, thanks of people and they bring down God's help, forgiveness, and healing.

Stories like this symbolise our hunch that there is something more to life than just what we can see and touch, more than just the here and now. We have a longing for something beyond, something other; this is our longing for God.

Jacob sees this stairway that connects earth and heaven. But then he sees even more. He sees God. It could be that he sees God standing above the stairway or it

could be that he sees God standing beside him. Maybe they are the same. Maybe heaven is not so very far away.

I wonder if he felt like Isaiah of Jerusalem. When Isaiah had a vision of God he said, "Woe is me. I am lost, for I am a man of unclean lips and I dwell among a people of unclean lips". Or did he felt like Peter who said to Jesus, "Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man"? Was Jacob aware in this moment of the hurt he had caused others, of his failure to be his brother's keeper? Did he gird his loins in readiness to receive God's stern judgement? Maybe, maybe not. Whatever he felt, now he prepares himself, for God is about to speak.

God bless you,

Tony