

Lake Shore Baptist Church Sermon July 19, 2020 Charlie Fuller

Text: Genesis 28:10-19a

Title: *Where Does God Take Naps?*

When I was a senior at Baylor I had an incredible experience. It was during the very last A Cappella Choir performance of the spring semester. Everyone was “in the zone.” Everything was just going wonderfully. We were singing better than we ever had before. But there was something else going on, something almost magical, something, may I say, spiritual?

It was forty-two years ago. But I remember we were at the First Baptist Church in Conroe. I remember there was white linoleum in the choir loft. I remember we had removed all the chairs and stood for the entire concert. I even remember that the choir microphones were mounted with round plexiglass discs. I have this powerful visual picture of the place where we had that experience.

Was it explainable by psychologists as one of Abraham Maslow’s peak experiences? Maybe. Were we simply “in the zone?” Like Michael Jordan or LeBron James? Or was God supernaturally present in our midst? I wouldn’t rule that out. Maybe it was all of the above?

=====

In today’s text, Jacob is high-tailing it out of town. He’s stolen his brother Esau’s birthright and then his blessing. His mother Rebekah packed him up some sandwiches and chips and said you better get out of here. “Go back to our homeland and stay with my brother Laban. It’s also time for you to find a wife and I can’t stand the girls around here. You go to my homeland. This trip can serve two purposes. We can keep you away from your brother who wants to kill you and we can find you a wife.”

Who knows what was going through Jacob’s mind as he started out on this trip. *He was headed away from the world he knew and toward a place he’d never been. He was leaving danger behind, but headed toward nothing but unknown in front of him.*

I’m guessing he was moving as quickly as possible and traveling some very long days. He had to put some distance between himself and his brother if he was going to keep breathing. So, he goes as far as he can and he makes himself a bed on the ground.

Laying on the hard ground with a rock for his pillow, Jacob goes to sleep. And he has a strange dream. There’s this stairway between the ground and the sky. Going up and down the staircase are God’s messengers. Then God shows up right there beside him. And God speaks. We must remember that when God speaks in Scripture, it’s a big deal. And when God is actually present with Jacob, that’s also a big deal.

God gives him a review of the course. God reminds Jacob of the promise, the promise made to his grandfather, Abraham. You see, the birthright and blessing he stole from his brother Esau came with some baggage of their own. Along with them came the

family promise. The family was still going to be numberless as dust. Jacob had to question that when he was running for his life, heading to a place he'd never been, and sleeping on the rocks.

Jacob had to have felt a little lonely, leaving home and certainty for a journey of uncertainty.

On May 24, 1738 Englishman John Wesley, founder of Methodism, had a famous experience. He tells it in these words:

“In the evening I went very unwillingly to a society in Aldersgate Street, where one was reading [Martin] Luther's preface to the Epistle to the Romans. About a quarter before nine, while he was describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed.”

While Wesley's story has some renown, what's not often told is how he was also on the run in his own way. Wesley had recently returned from what was basically a failed mission to the Georgian colony in America. He was also a bit on the run, not unlike our friend Jacob.

And another thing Wesley had in common with Jacob was the incredible experience he had. Jacob had a dream with constant reminders that he was in the very presence of God. The voice he was hearing wasn't the spicy falafel he had for dinner. It was the voice of God.

God was reassuring Jacob on the journey. Letting Jacob know that God was still present, right there at his side, accompanying him on this trip to *who knows where*.

Do you feel like you're on a trip to "who knows where?"

Jacob was no doubt marked by this spiritual experience. Our text says, “Jacob woke from his sleep and said, "Surely the LORD is in this place--and I did not know it! And he was afraid, and said, "How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven. So, Jacob rose early in the morning, and he took the stone that he had put under his head and set it up for a pillar and poured oil on the top of it. He called that place Bethel...”

Friends, Bethel means “God's house.” Jacob found God in that place along the road. That place where he slept on the rocks. I'm betting that Jacob remembered what he was wearing, what he ate, and even what the air smelled like that morning. I bet for the rest of his life he could feel the imprint of the stone he used for a pillow. And I'm betting that he remembered the uncertainty he felt striking out toward *who knows where*.” And we know Jacob remembered. Years and years later when he returned to Palestine, he returned to Bethel and made it a place of worship.

Folks, we're all on a journey to *who knows where*. If that didn't seem true before the pandemic, it certainly does now. We're all on a journey *toward uncertainty*. As we travel this journey, it's a good time for us to remember our *own* Jacob stories. Maybe it was in a church building, during a worship service, on a mission trip, or just walking in the woods. Wherever and whenever *your* story took place, this is a great time to draw on the power of your own story, to remind yourself that God is always present to you just like God was to Jacob.

And this is a time for us to be on the lookout for Jacob experiences staring us in the face. Jacob didn't set out to have a vision from God. He hadn't even asked for such an experience. He didn't ask for the reassurance of God's presence. But God reminded him anyway. Sometimes holy ground finds us whether we're looking for holy ground or not.

May we have hearts and minds open enough to see our own Jacob experiences when they happen. As they happen along this journey we're on, this sometimes solitary journey of pandemic isolation. Just like with Jacob, God reminds us over and over that God is always present, even when the journey is strewn with rocks.

Some of you may have found my sermon title a bit heretical. After all it says in Scripture that God neither slumbers nor sleeps. But it says in Genesis that on the seventh day God rested. I think God took a nap.

So, where does God take a nap? Right by your side. Even if you're having to use a rock for your pillow.

Amen.