

Proper 11, Year A

July 20, 2014

St. Stephen's Episcopal Church, Belvedere

The Rev. Shari Young, Preaching

Have you ever felt like you were in a waking nightmare? Feeling like everything has gone wrong, and there is no apparent way out?

This is the circumstance of Jacob, our patriarch, in today's first lesson. Last week we heard the story of him as a young man tricking his older twin brother out of the family inheritance. Selling silly ravenous Esau a bowl of hot soup in exchange for the enormity of the birthright. The right of inheritance which gave the entire estate to the oldest. Jacob was devious and Esau was foolish.

Fast forward to today's story. Jacob has, with the aid of his conniving mother Rachel, now tricked his father Isaac, and swindled his brother again out of the final paternal blessing solidifying the inheritance. As Isaac lay on his death bed dying and blind, Jacob tricked him in order to get the inheritance. No law courts and attorneys, simply the spoken word of the patriarch to seal the deal and guarantee Jacob the wealth of flocks and herds that was his fathers. Jacob was a rich man. He had done it.

The deal was sealed, but a lot of good it did Jacob when his brother came to kill him. Certain death was his, and in a moment his life of plotting and cheating turned his ill-gotten fortune turned to ashes. He went from living a dream to living a nightmare; he ran for his life with nothing.

In today's gospel the sower, the owner of a field, is also living a nightmare. He has sown his field with wheat seed, expecting a fine harvest to sustain his family and perhaps to sell: we are not told.

When the wheat begins growing, his helpers come to tell him that darnel, a toxic weed, is growing in and among the wheat. This parable is commonly called "The Wheat and the Tares." What a nightmare for the owner: To weed out the darnel would uproot the wheat and kill it, and to wait until harvest is to poison the wheat crop. A bounty had become a curse.

As a nation, we seem to be in the middle of a living nightmare right now. Things have not exactly been hunky-dory lately but things seem worse. .

+Israel is at war with Hamas and has invaded Gaza. The wildfire inferno in the Middle East is spreading.

+The mysterious downing of a Malaysian airliner in Ukrainian, and loss of innocent life, has become an international incident

+Thousands of children are trying to escape the horrific violence they live with at home, caused by the drug war, and are now trapped at the border in a bureaucratic and governmental hell.

An important note which make it personal for us as a congregation: Many of these children come from Honduras, and especially from San Pedro Sula, the most violent city and country in the world.

This is the home of the Rev. Pascual Torres and Siempre Unidos, our sister ministry giving medical aid to those with HIV and AIDS.

You may remember that their night watchman was murdered apparently for his firearms. We have a direct connection to this horror.

(NY Times, July 13, 2014)

(silence)

What happened to Jacob in his living nightmare? His mother Rachel, ever his loyal partner in crime, arranged for him to run away and go on foot to her brother's house in Haran, about 400 miles away. Quite a come down for the son of a rich man.

After one day's journey he came to Bet El and fell asleep with his head on a rock, no doubt exhausted. There he had an incredible vision of a ladder going up into heaven, with angels going up and down from the heavenly realm to earth. God stood next to him and promised him land and descendants and the blessed constant presence of God.

Jacob's response is to bless and worship God, and pour ceremonial oil and worships God in that place and it becomes a holy shrine.

What is the outcome of the wheat and the tares, the darnel, the toxic weeds sown among the wheat? They are separated out by angels and the crop is saved for God.

What words of comfort and guidance could possible be here for us in this time of global nightmare?

When we come together weekly to worship, we have a time of angels coming down and going up to heaven. We come here and get respite from the difficulties of our journey just like Jacob did. We have God here among us when we are gathered in God's name. We may have a vision, or inspiration, or comfort, or healing.

The music lifts us up to heaven, the bread and the wine bring us down to earth as food for the journey. We may come here resting our heads on hard, uncomfortable rocks with heavy hearts, but God is in this place to meet us. We hear the promise us that God will be with us always.

Like Jacob, there is nothing we do to deserve this. We can even come here with great sin blemishing our lives and the Spirit still blesses who it will bless.

This is not to say we do not have work to do both personally and as a nation.

+We still have our burdens to carry; sometimes we have to man up.

+We have changes to make, and things to do; some of which we have been procrastinating about

+We have forgiveness to give and receive.

+We have letters to write, connections to make, and actions to undertake

+We have earnest prayers to make for ourselves, others, and the world.

I think especially of the immigrant children at our borders, and Pascual and Elizabeth Torres and the adults and children of Siempre Unidos.

The promise is that God is always with us, and we are especially close to the that Spirit when we gather here together to worship and share the bread and the wine..