

“God Is In THIS Place!”
Genesis 28:10-17
Scott Jespersen and Rick Plain

Most of us understand that sometimes bad things happen to good people. Natural disasters, famine and drought, disease, tragic deaths and accidents, and innocent victims of war and conflict all are bad things that happen to good people.

Most of us understand that good things happen to bad people. Selfishness, arrogance, fear, jealousy, envy, and greed are not against the law. Even people who behave badly, or are sinners, or, as some propose as the politically correct term to replace “sin,” “morally challenged,” are entitled to be treated as human beings, with respect and dignity, and so on.

What is hard to understand is when God seems to bless, even favor, scoundrels and severely “morally challenged” people. Well, unless that person happens to be me or you, right?

A little background on Jacob prior to the scripture text we read and heard:

Jacob, the son of Issac and grandson of Abraham, was smart and talented. He was also proud, arrogant, rude, and self absorbed. He was cruel to and made fun of his burly, copiously red haired, outdoors type fraternal twin brother, Esau. Jacob was his mom’s, Rebecca’s, favorite. Esau, the first born twin, was dad’s, Issac’s, favorite. Spouses at odds with each other and natural sibling rivalry distorted more by parental favoritism. Lovey-dovey newlyweds Issac and Rebecca, after 20 years of marriage and a couple of kids, tailspin into the kind of dysfunctional family mess we have come to know all too well.

The time arrived for the aging and near blind Issac to bestow the first born son’s birthright inheritance blessing upon Esau. Rebecca thought Jacob deserved the blessing and convinced him to lie to his father. The ruse worked and Issac pronounced the blessing upon Jacob. Besides demeaning and belittling his brother, Jacob adds to his list of transgressions lying, cheating, and theft.

Our text being with Jacob’s first night running scared because he fears Esau will hunt him down and kill him. Jacob feels lucky to have a sizable rock for a pillow.

If you were God how would you appear to Jacob? How about a soul shaking earthquake with a touch of fire and brimstone? Lightning striking the ground around him would be a good wake up call. How about God chewing him out in a thundering voice?

But no, God gave Jacob a wonderful dream of a ladder, or ramp, between earth and heaven with angels ascending and descending the ladder. God speaks to Jacob alright, but promises to protect and care for him, bring him back to a vastly expanded homestead, and make him a revered patriarch of a huge family. No wonder I have never read a commentary on Genesis where the scholar ever read claimed God’s attributes included being a good judge of character or having an ounce of common sense. That is good news for me! How about you?

Does Jacob deserve such an awe inspiring dream or God’s unmerited blessing? On the one hand, definitely not. On the other hand, why not? Deeper than God’s heart and passion for fairness and justice is God’s heart and passion that we know and share from the center of our hearts and spirits God’s own mercy, grace, love, compassion, tenderness, kindness, and humility.

We will come back to Jacob a little later. Right now it is good to hear from another bright, intelligent, talented, handsome young man, Scott Jespersen, who is not

behaving badly nor running away from a mess and deserves the best of God's promises, visions, and dreams for his life and shares God's own heart and blessings with us.

This summer our theme is "This Is Our Story, This Is Our Song." I am so grateful Scott is willing to add part of his story to the stories we know.

Rick: Scott, tell us about your college and other plans and dreams for your future?

Scott: I am headed off to Pomona college in just over a month from now. Nothing is set in stone yet, but I would love to make a career out of composing and playing music. From a financial standpoint, a lot of people would say that that *is* a dream, but I simply enjoy music too much to demote it to just a hobby. I envision myself perhaps directing a choral or band program at some point in my future.

Rick: How has LAUMC supported and encouraged you and what you feel God wants you to do with your life?

Scott: Well, to begin with, Starfire has been my primary method of involvement with the church. The group has really showed me how much fun music can be. I also think I owe a ton to Dirk and Carol for having modeled what true passion for music looks like in the adult world; without that source of inspiration, I doubt I would be as passionate about music as I am today. Lastly, I am very grateful for the opportunity to play with Creekside Worship Band, which is always a blast and has just been a great outlet for my musical tendencies.

Rick: What advice and counsel do you offer to us as we prepare to support and encourage youth and young adults in the years ahead to find God's purpose and vision for their lives?

Scott: I think that as a community, we should continue to encourage youth to not be afraid to try new things and simply be open to new opportunities. People have to feel like there is nothing holding them back from fulfilling their dreams, because one's mindset is crucial to how those dreams unfold. If they truly believe they can accomplish anything, then they will be able to. I genuinely believe that.

Scott: Now, I'd like to share with you a small piece of music that I've composed. Composing is one of my greatest passions, and I don't expect that to change anytime soon. I might even end up making some of it up as I go along. I leave you with this small token of my appreciation for having supported me in my endeavors.

Obviously we celebrate God's presence, promises, and blessings in Scott's life.

But what about Jacob? Why does God bless him? Because God wants to bless all of us and God needs all of us in order to do what God wants done. What is God's will and purpose? From our text today, verses 14-15: "by you and your descendants shall all the families of the earth bless themselves...for I will not leave you until I have done that of which I have spoken to you." This story is a story about God. But because it is story about God and God's purposes it also is a story about Jacob. And a story about God and us, too.

The good news is God is always with us. There is no place where God is not. God is the ultimate workaholic and does not take time off. Are you running away from a mess you have made? God is with you and wants to bless you. Has somebody dumped some ugly mess on you? God is with you and wants you to find the blessing, the meaning and purpose, only you can discover.

The good news is each of us and all of us together, are vital to what God wants to do for the sake of all God's children and creation.

After all, the unfathomable center of God's heart and passion overflows with mercy, grace, love, compassion, tenderness, kindness, and humility.

Do you know God is in this place?

Can you hear God's voice?

Can you feel yourself engulfed and embraced in God's heart and purpose for your life? Amen.