

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

My fond memories of camping include leaving something behind that was needed. Matches, paper towels, trash bags or spare batteries. It didn't really ruin the trip, but I had to improvise or do without.

If you forget something when you are camping or on a vacation and you absolutely have to have, you can head to the nearest store.

Jacob, in Genesis 28, was in a much more serious situation. He had to leave home in a hurry. He didn't have time to take a lot of provisions. They didn't have convenience stores along the road like we do today.

Jacob was a believer in the Lord. However, he had caused the mess in which he found himself. Would the Lord help him? His survival depended on it. He did not need to worry.

The Lord appears to Jacob in a dream at Bethel. The dream reminds Jacob and all of us how the Lord is compassionate and gracious toward his children. We learn today that Jacob and you and I are... **Blessed by the Lord on Life's Journey**

1. The Lord is near.

In the dream the Lord shows that he is very near Jacob. The fact that the Lord is near is an important blessing.

A. When Jacob went to sleep he may have imagined that he was all alone. Isn't that what we think, when we get in trouble?

1. Jacob was in trouble because he sinned by deceiving his father and making his brother angry. The family life that was so dear to him was now gone. The only question that remained, was he alone in the desert without God, that is spiritually alone?

Centuries later Jesus, God's Son, would spend days and nights alone in the wilderness. He was driven there not by his own sins, but by the Holy Spirit. He would spend time alone for Jacob and us, facing Satan's temptations.

2. Jacob is not forsaken by God. He falls asleep and has a dream. In the dream there is a stairway. Many good angels are present. They are ascending and descending on the stairway. The Lord God himself was present at the top of the stairway.

The meaning is plain. God is with Jacob. Most importantly the Lord has forgiven his sins of deceiving his father. God could forgive because of Jesus' perfect obedience in the future. A sign of this forgiveness is the angels are going up with Jacob's prayers and needs. Other angels are coming down with God's loving response to those prayers. The Lord hears your and my prayers because of Jesus.

2. The Lord gives promises.

The Lord's love is such that he doesn't simply imply his help, but he speaks and he gives promises. He says, **"I am the Lord, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac."** (13b) The Lord could have simply said, **"I am the God of your fathers."**, but he doesn't. He says, **"I am the Lord, the God..."** What he is saying is *"I am God and I am the one who wants to save you and all people because I am a compassionate and gracious God."* When God's Old Testament people saw the word "LORD" in all capitol letters, they thought of their God who had given them precious promises. At this point the Lord repeats these promise to Jacob.

A. The Lord promises land and family. **13c I will give you and your descendants the land on which you are lying. 14 Your descendants will be like the dust of the earth, and you will spread out to the west and to the east, to the north and to the south.**

Remember Jacob's situation. He had left home with very little, whatever he could carry. He didn't have access to the family wealth. Even in Canaan, his family had no permanent home. He had no wife or children at this point in his life.

Therefore, the Lord assures that Jacob's descendants will receive the Land of Canaan and that he will have many descendants. Jacob did end up with great material wealth of his own and many sons and later grandchildren.

It is very easy for us to worry when we suffer a turn of "fortune." One minute we are financially fine and then the money markets fall. Otherwise, there may be an auto accident or some other accident. Perhaps are many medical expense that pile up. When you are young and have a family, even one doctor bill can pinch or if you are on a fixed senior income.

The Lord is compassionate today. He promises to give what is needed each day. That is why Jesus commands us to pray, **"Give us this day our daily bread."** He intends to answer our prayers and meet our needs. We can be confident.

B. The Lord speaks of spiritual blessings for Jacob and all people.

1. Jacob needed this promise more than all the others. As he lay on the cool dry ground, his conscience was likely tender and aching. He had lied. Above all he was guilty of not trusting in the Lord in dealing with his father.

You and I routinely have problems with others. It can be a family problem. It might be a work problem or a doctor problem. Do we take matters into our own hands, manipulating the situation. When we can't fix things, do we go off and hit people with a few choice words because we are angry? In our prayers do we sob and complain to God that he is not doing enough? We all have our "Jacob" moments. We need special promise given here by the Lord.

2. The Savior of the world will be one of Jacob's offspring. This had been promised to Abraham and Isaac, now it is Jacob's turn. All people on earth will be blessed through a special child to be born.

Jesus states in the Gospel of John, "**Abraham saw my day and rejoiced.**" (Jn. 8:56) Abraham knew that one his descendants would be God who come to take away his sins. In the Gospel for today, Jesus, Abraham's descendant announces, "**the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again.**" (Mark 8) Jesus died for Abraham, Jacob and you and me. He paid for our sins and then rose from the dead.

Jacob had peace in Jesus as he journeyed and so do you.

C. This would have been enough, but the Lord also promises protection and that he will not leave Jacob. Reading on Genesis will show you that the Lord kept his promise.

Today we have the promise of Jesus to his disciples, "**I will be with you always.**" (Matthew 28) We can't look forward, but as time goes by we can look back and see the Lord faithfully watching over us. Every once in a while someone at church will tell me that another car almost hit them, but didn't. They will usually say, "*The Lord was watching over me.*" This is true remember the Lord's promise in Psalm 91 to have his angels watch over you.

3. The Lord blesses his faith.

In the last two verses, we have Jacob's reaction recorded for us. As we listen to Jacob, we can tell that his faith has been strengthened.

A. Jacob awoke from his sleep, he thought, “Surely the Lord is in this place, and I was not aware of it.” Jacob may have thought he was alone before, but now he knows the Lord is with him. He trusts in the Lord’s presence.

Jacob may have missed home, but now he says, **“How awesome is this place.”** He seems to understand that where ever God is, that is “home.” In the year’s ahead Jacob would like his father **“proclaim the name of the Lord.”** He would set up worship services and preach about the coming Savior. God would be present. Jesus has promised us, **“Where two or three gather in my name, there am I in the midst of them.”** That is sacred ground, that is “home” for believers. Of course, there is a home for us in Heaven where God dwells.

Conclusion: One of the places I used to go camping in Prescott is 10 minutes away from a store. If I forgot to pack something, it wasn’t a big deal.

Life is a journey where, you want to be prepared. We may at times, especially because of our sins, feel alone. Jacob went through this.

The Lord revealed himself to Jacob. Jacob had forgiveness and much more. He had God’s promises.

As you journey through life, understand that you are not alone. The Lord reveals himself in Word and Sacrament. He forgives our sins. Jesus will help us carry our crosses. He will empty our tomb and bring us safely home. The Lord blesses us on Life’s Journey. Amen.

Gospel Mark 8:31-38 (NIV 2011)

31 He then began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again. 32 He spoke plainly about this, and Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him.

33 But when Jesus turned and looked at his disciples, he rebuked Peter. “Get behind me, Satan!” he said. “You do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns.”

34 Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: “Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. 35 For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me and for the gospel will save it. 36 What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? 37 Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul? 38 If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of them when he comes in his Father’s glory with the holy angels.”