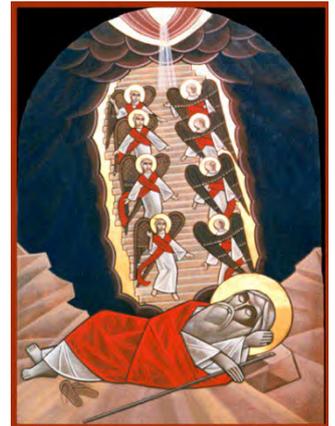


20 July 2014 Sixth Sunday after Pentecost

Genesis 28:10-19; Psalm 139:1-11, 23-24; Romans 8: 12-25 Matthew 13:24-43

**Proper 11A/Ordinary 16A/Pentecost +6 July 20, 2014**

Jacob's dream and the image of Jacob's ladder are well known biblical cameos. Like the readings we've looked at over the past couple of weeks they served a purpose for the people of Israel and all are foundational in shaping the Hebrew tradition, a tradition on which the Christian tradition is built.



Today's reading from Genesis is one of the reference texts for Israel's claim to land rights; God tells Jacob: "*the land on which you lie I will give to you and to your offspring*".

However, when we read this, and other sacred texts, it is helpful to look beyond the obvious and to contemplate, or seek, a deeper universal insight.

Within every religious tradition, including our own, we will find a claim to validate our own perspective, and once found, that claim gives rise to an exclusive appreciation of God and of ourselves. These exclusive claims within each religious tradition in turn create division and conflict and that is readily witnessed by the crusades in our tradition that mirror the Jihads of another tradition.

These claims of validation are obviously not the good seeds that are sowed in the field of Holy Scriptures, rather they are more like the appearance of weeds that we find in the parable of the Sower in today's gospel.

Let's hear again the start of that parable: "*The kingdom of heaven may be compared to someone who sowed good seed in his field; 25 but while everybody was asleep, an enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and then went away. 26 So when the plants came up and bore grain, then the weeds appeared as well.*"

The weeds were sowed "*while everybody was asleep*" and only when the plants originally planted came up and bore fruit were the weeds seen.

Let's keep that in mind as we go back and look further at the first reading from Genesis.

First of all we might acknowledge the orthodox understanding of Jacob's dream that we inherited from the Hebrew tradition. The dream itself reflects a worldview of the time with heaven above and earth below, literally an understanding of the cosmos at that time.

In the dream Jacob is given an insight of angels, messengers of God that move freely via the ladder between heaven and Earth bringing God's message to Jacob. Here we again can appreciate a primitive worldview that sees God as a person residing in heaven and using his angels he gives instructions to selective people on earth. In today's example, God gives

instructions to a significant political figure for the people of Israel, and gives them ownership of a particular landscape.

Probably very much like the way God gives instructions to Tony Abbot today! Hopefully, that's enough of an exploration for us to appreciate that such an orthodox understanding does not resonate with our own worldview, or with our understanding of God.

And when we ask ourselves a couple of simple, for example:

Why does God choose one person and one people over another?

And why does God no longer intervene to sort out the groaning labour pains of the World?

We can readily appreciate that the primitive interpretations of these stories is very much a plucking at weeds rather than a gathering of harvest.

So let's look again at the narrative without a pre-determined agenda for self-justification.

The icon in the service sheet is a good starting point for contemplation; it gives an acceptable image of the narrative and also has the unreality that we all experience in the world of our dreams.

When we look at the icon, we immediately see that its focus is on Jacob's dream, that is where our contemplation is being directed, Jacob asleep with his eyes closed and the dream depicted for us to see.

And so we 'read' through the icon, that in his dream, Jacob receives a Divine insight, a view of Divine reality that is unseen (not visible with the eyes).

Now we turn to our own experience of dreaming for some further input; and in our experience we will probably acknowledge that the significance of the dream is only realised in our waking up!

However, the icon misses this significant moment from the narrative and so we need to go back to the text; *"16 Then Jacob woke from his sleep and said, "Surely the LORD is in this place--and I did not know it!"*"

When Jacob awakes, he sees the world as a different place, the unseen is now visible to him and that changes everything.

And now we might look again at the icon as an icon of ourselves, and an image of humanity.

We each have some insight into the 'movement' of God, albeit not necessarily up and down ladders. Our faith, our awareness of God, our own individual and corporate encounter with the Divine is like a dream for it is outside of time. Our spiritual life, the truest reality of our being, exists in eternity, not in the visible 24/7 timescale that only serves to link birth with death.

And so like Jacob, we too have our Divine dream and our faith might well be represented as a ladder or bridge between two realities, the realities of heaven and earth, the realities of divinity and humanity, eternity and mortality.

Now we might see that in the first reading today we are being alerted to our awakening.

We each have some insight into the ‘movement’ of God; however, it is only in our awakening that we too can find ourselves surprised, like Jacob, to find “*the LORD is in this place--and we[I] did not know it!*”

Do we see the church in the Icon of the dream, having received the message of God through the Holy Scriptures the Church lies asleep dreaming of God’s Divine message and yet not awakening to the realisation of the same?

The life and teaching of Jesus take us beyond what is portrayed in the Icon of Jacob’s dream, for Christ reveals that there is no ladder between heaven and earth...

In the first chapter of John’s gospel [v51] he tells Nathaniel: “*Very truly, I tell you, you will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man.*”

The awakening of Jacob is the enlightenment that is later revealed through Christ: “*the LORD is in this place*”; and that for us changes the whole tradition on which our faith is founded. Like Jacob, when we are awake to the reality of the Divine dream, we will perceive the whole world in a different way.

The readings today are full of encouragement, and they also ask much of us....

We must awake to the reality that we live in *Bethel – the house of God*, it is not in heaven, and there is no ladder to climb, “*the LORD is in this place*”....

In W B Yeats’ poem “The Circus Animals' Desertion” he alludes to the place we begin our awakening:

*Now that my ladder's gone,  
I must lie down where all the ladders start  
In the foul rag and bone shop of the heart.*

Our awakening to the reality of God’s dream, and to the unseen reality that Christ brought into light ironically will have the ups and downs that seemed to be the very movement of the angels in the dream; but in today’s psalm there again is great encouragement:

*7 If I ascend into heaven you are there:  
if I make my bed in the grave you are there also.*

So the psalm tells us that in both our ascents and descents we are in the same circumstances, that even in our descents we are still on a ladder connecting our heaven and earth: we are still in contact with whatever permitted us to ascend.

The icon of Jacob’s dream, invites us into the reality of our encounter with God.

The parable of the sower invites us to discern the weeds from the harvest.

Both ask us to open our eyes, and to awaken to the reality that we have previously only dreamed of: “*the LORD is in this place*”....