



Martin Luther
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Church**

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Devotion 1st Sunday after Trinity

Do you know Jacob? The son of Isaac and Rebekah? The twin brother of Esau? Jacob was a tender, homely type, his brother a real guy, a hunter. Esau was the elder, Jacob the younger. So, it was clear: Esau inherits everything once the parents are dead. But the mother was on Jacob's side, so she helped him get his father Isaac's blessing with a ruse and thus become the heir. So, Jacob deceived his father and his brother. Now he has to flee. Jacob sets out with great fear. His brother is angry and rages. Jacob is alone for the first time without his mother in the wilderness with its animals and dangers. And now it becomes night. That's the way the story goes in Genesis in the 27th chapter, verses 10-17:

Jacob left Beersheba and set out for Harran. When he reached a certain place, he stopped for the night because the sun had set. Taking one of the stones there, he put it under his head and lay down to sleep. He had a dream in which he saw a stairway resting on the earth, with its top reaching to heaven, and the angels of God were ascending and descending on it. There above it stood the LORD, and he said: "I am the LORD, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac. I will give you and your descendants the land on which you are lying. 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. All peoples on earth will be blessed through you and your offspring. I am with you and will watch over you wherever you go, and I will bring you back to this land. I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you."

When Jacob awoke from his sleep, he thought, "Surely the LORD is in this place, and I was not aware of it." He was afraid and said, "How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God; this is the gate of heaven."

A clean conscience is a good pillow - and Jacob's pillow is a stone! He is a deceiver. But it is to him that God shows himself. God is like that. He is also there where you least expect him. In the stranger, in the loneliness, in the cold, empty night, in guilt. The emptiness, felt and admitted, fills up. Cold becomes warmth. Loneliness becomes an experience of God's nearness. "Truly the Lord is in this place and I did not know it! How holy is this place! Here is nothing but God's house, and here is the gate of heaven."

Have you ever had moments when you saw the invisible ladder between earth and heaven? Where you felt: God is with me, even in fear, in strangeness, in pain and in guilt? God is with me in trial and in sickness and in sorrow?

The story of Jacob and the ladder to heaven shows me: without God's blessing we cannot live. His blessing is always (!) undeserved. His blessing reaches us when we least expect it. His blessing says to us: I am with you and will keep you and will not leave you. Through his presence and nearness our life becomes the house of God, the gate of heaven. In the middle of the night. Even in the struggle. Despite all guilt and injuries. God is near.

And there is another thing the story shows me:

It seems to be a human need to mark places of our experiences with the divine, the holy. Jacob was not the first to come up with this idea. I think of Stonehenge or other places where stones were erected with a meaning that is often obscure today.

Today a group from our community is going to the petroglyphs. This is a sacred place for the indigenous peoples of the area and there are rocks with very old inscriptions to discover. If you want to know more about it, you can study the attached information or visit the website:

<https://www.ontarioparks.com/park/petroglyphs>

We welcome the opportunity to learn more about and appreciate the rich and diverse history and current realities of First Nations, Inuit and Métis people throughout the province and Canada during National Indigenous History Month. Our intercessions today, therefore, focus on them and share them with you:

Intercessions

Creator of the world, we come to you in gratitude for the beauty of this land and all the people who call it home. Guide us to become better stewards of this earth. Help us

learn how best to care for lakes, waterways, and the abundant bounty of trees, fields, berries, and all the creatures that live among us. We thank you for the first peoples who cared for this area and welcomed newcomers to the land. Hear our prayer.

Source of consolation, we come to you with heavy hearts for those whose laughter has been stifled, for those who have fallen silent, for those who will no longer dance or play. We pray for those whose dream of life has become a nightmare. We confess that Christian churches have been involved and many Christians have looked the other way, not seeing or hearing the cries of our indigenous neighbors. We thank you for the resilience and strength of those who have endured great hardship. Hear our prayer.

Eternal Light, we come to you in sorrow for those whose bodies lie in the water, in the forest or in the field, far from home. We pray for those who feel displaced from their community. We pray in solidarity with those who have been left behind to reorder their lives. We pray for those who have chosen suicide to end the pain. We pray for the families who do not know where to find their loved ones. Hear our prayer.

Loving God, we come to you asking for a sense of your presence in the lives of those whose hearts ache with loneliness and loss. We pray for all who suffer in body, soul or spirit. Hear our prayer.

Source of all wisdom, we come to you with gratitude for the recovery of lost languages, stories and traditions. We rejoice when First Nations, Inuit and Métis communities are willing to share their histories, teachings and cultural identities with us. We ask you to help us listen carefully and attentively to what our neighbors have to say. Through these gifts we will become stronger and wiser. We pray in hope for a future built on respect, peace and friendship. Hear our prayer.

Merciful God, you know our needs before we ask. Move us to action, send us your healing presence, and give us strength for the week ahead.

Anything else that is on our hearts we bring before God by praying together as Jesus taught us....

Our Father who art in heaven.

Hallowed be your name.

Your kingdom come.

Your will be done,

on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread.

And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us.

And lead us not into temptation,

but deliver us from evil.

For thine is the kingdom

and the power and the glory

for ever and ever. Amen.

Blessing

The peace of God, which is higher than our understanding, keep our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.