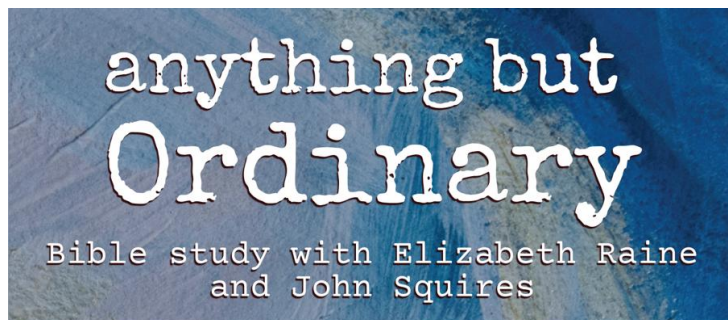




16 July

Pentecost 16
Gen. 28:10-19a

Encountering the divine out of the ordinary
(Jacob and the ladder)

God of story and saga, as we read the stories of ancient Israel,
help us to understand how you were at work shaping a people to be a light to the world.

God of challenge and drama, as we enter into the stories of old and consider the ways that people have responded to you,
may we sense how the life of faith requires commitment, openness, and discovery.

God of faith and new ventures, from our engagement in these stories from an age-old saga, **may we be enriched and encouraged to engage in our own times, as your people, serving in your world. Amen.**

Please read Genesis 28 before the study, if you are able:

The questions we may discuss are listed on the following pages.

(for context) 41 Now Esau hated Jacob because of the blessing with which his father had blessed him, and Esau said to himself, "The days of mourning for my father are approaching; then I will kill my brother Jacob." 42 But the words of her elder son Esau were told to Rebekah; so she sent and called her younger son Jacob and said to him, "Your brother Esau is consoling himself by planning to kill you. 43 Now therefore, my son, obey my voice; flee at once to my brother Laban in Haran, 44 and stay with him a while, until your brother's fury turns away."

28:1 Then Isaac called Jacob and blessed him, and charged him, "You shall not marry one of the Canaanite women. 2 Go at once to Paddan-aram to the house of Bethuel, your mother's father; and take as wife from there one of the daughters of Laban, your mother's brother..

6 Now Esau saw that Isaac had blessed Jacob and sent him away to Paddan-aram to take a wife from there ... 9 Esau went to Ishmael and took Mahalath daughter of Abraham's son Ishmael, and sister of Nebaioth, to be his wife in addition to the wives he had.

10 Jacob left Beer-sheba and went toward Haran. 11 He came to a certain place and stayed there for the night, because the sun had set. Taking one of the stones of the place, he put it under his head and lay down in that place. 12 And he dreamed that there was a ladder set up on the earth, the top of it reaching to heaven; and the angels of God were ascending and descending on it.

13 And the LORD stood beside him and said, "I am the LORD, the God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac; the land on which you lie I will give to you and to your offspring; 14 and your offspring shall be like the dust of the earth, and you shall spread abroad to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south; and all the families of the earth shall be blessed in you and in your offspring.

15 Know that I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land; for I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you."

16 Then Jacob woke from his sleep and said, "Surely the LORD is in this place — and I did not know it!" 17 And he was afraid, and said, "How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven."

18 So Jacob rose early in the morning, and he took the stone that he had put under his head and set it up for a pillar and poured oil on the top of it. 19 He called that place Bethel; but the name of the city was Luz at the first. 20 Then Jacob made a vow, saying, "If God will be with me, and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat and clothing to wear, 21 so that I come again to my father's house in peace, then the LORD shall be my God, 22 and this stone, which I have set up for a pillar, shall be God's house; and of all that you give me I will surely give one-tenth to you."

Questions on Genesis 28

1 Dreaming in the Bible *Who are “the dreamers” in the Bible?*

2 The context *Where is Jacob?* [you might like to refer to the map below]

3 The angels in this story

“He dreamed that there was a ladder set up on the earth, the top of it reaching to heaven; and the angels of God were ascending and descending on it” (Gen 28:12)

To whom do angels appear elsewhere in the Bible?

How many types of angels are there in the Old Testament?

What forms do these angels take??

4 The ladder

Rabbi Haim of Volozhin [an 18th century Lithuanian sage] views Torah learning as a Sinaitic event, since Torah is what connects the heavens and the earth. “With Torah, one can ascend and descend between the two spheres. The people who do so are angel-like.”

In other words: we human beings are not spiritual beings, trapped in the prison of the material world (as Plato imagined, and as many writers, including Paul, who were influenced by his philosophy, wrote). Rather, we are fully *nephesh*, creatures of God containing both material and spiritual characteristics. We belong both to earth and to heaven.

What do you think of what the Rabbi says? Do you see yourself in this way?

5 Nephesh

In the Hebrew Bible, *nephesh* (נֶפֶשׁ) is used to describe the essence of life in both humans and animals. It is used in the Bible of all living creatures—human beings, as well as “the fish of the sea, the birds of the air, the cattle [domesticated animals], the wild animals of the earth, and every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth” (Gen 1:26).

How does the biblical use of nephesh illuminate our nature as God’s creatures?

6 Thin places

Jacob is travelling in the wilderness, heading away from Canaan and back to Haran, the place that his grandparents Abram and Sarai had left years before. In a sense, the journey of Jacob symbolically reverses the journey made by Abram and Sarai into the land promised by God. Jacob is travelling away, through the desert. This encounter takes place in the wilderness, between the places of civilisation. It becomes “a thin place” (as the Celts name such places) where he has an encounter with God.

Have you had the experience of finding yourself in “a thin place”?

If so, what happened during this experience?

7 Relationship with God

Accompanying the dream of Jacob is a sense of the presence of God; the divine speaks to Jacob, assuring him that God will never leave him. Jacob could never go beyond God’s keeping; angels accompany him on his onward journey to northern Mesopotamia, which was his destination (Gen 29:1). These angels keep going up and coming down on the ladder during this journey; more than this, they continue to accompany him for the twenty years he spends in Haran and then travel with him on his return to the land of Canaan (Gen 31:11; 32:1). The story has a strong sense of the enduring, faithful nature of God’s accompaniment of people of faith throughout their lives.

Can we have a relationship with God without Jesus? Can we express our spirituality in ways other than through Jesus? Church? Christianity?

There are two blogs to read, if you like, in relation to this passage.

One by Elizabeth:

<https://ruralreverend.blogspot.com/2014/10/transforming-heart-stardust-in-thin-and.html>

One by John:

<https://johntsquires.com/2025/09/16/i-had-a-dream-genesis-27-28-narrative-lectionary-for-pentecost-15/>

