

April 19, 2020
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text: Genesis 28: 10-12
title: 'Letters from God'



Easter happened last week, and it was different than any other Easter in the last 2,020 years. I assure you! In the church, Easter is not a single day; it is a church season. In these 50 days of the Easter season, the disciples are waiting to see what happens next. The Resurrection story has been announced; Jesus is once again left them. They are told to wait and see what comes next.

That's where we are in these weeks today as well. We are waiting to see what is going to happen next - in our personal life - in our community, our nation, in the world? What will happen with the virus? When can we come out and play again? Will we learn from this? The Earth shows us she's waiting too; she is waiting for us to let her heal. Will we decide to pollute less now that we have been shown it means our sky can be clear and mountains shrouded in death wraps can be set loose and seen again? How will the church emerge from the tomb differently this year?

This time is a monumental Easter for the world, for today and perhaps for generations to come. Remember, **resurrection is not about going back to the way it was, it is looking forward to what will be.**

I had this weird dream last night. Has anyone else said that lately? I know I've heard it from others. I saw an article in my newsfeed this week that people are reporting more dreams during the pandemic. So, I had this dream last week. I dreamed that I was in my kayak going down a mighty rushing river. Now, I love to kayak, so you might think that it was a comforting dream, a fun dream, and adventure. Nope, the thing was, I didn't have a paddle. No paddle in a kayak means I had no way to propel, steer, or maneuver. I was being swept along by this great force of water, and I had no control. Now that dream is pretty apparent as to how my subconscious is feeling these days. Just in case I have been in denial or out of touch with my feelings, in my "I'm fine" answers, I was given a message of truth, clear and simple. I feel like I have no control because I don't.

It seems like a good time over the next few weeks to look at dreams. In these next weeks, I'll share what some dreams from the Bible say in our faith tradition and how we might learn about understanding our own dreams.

Ancient Hebrews and early Christians claimed that one of the primary ways God speaks to God's people is through dreams. Notice I said not "a" way, but the "primary" way. One of the very names of God is three Hebrew letters meaning "Dream State." Third century Babylonian sage Rabbi Hisda wrote:

"A dream uninterpreted is like a letter from God unopened." ¹

This ancient understanding is confirmed within the story of Job where it is written, "In a dream, in a vision of the night, when deep sleep falls upon mortals, when they slumber on their beds, then God opens their ears." ² God uses dreams to guide, warn turn mortals

¹ Robert Haden Jr. Unopened Letters from God. 2010.

² Job 33: 15-16

aside from pride and pitfalls and spares their lives. Our Judeo-Christian teachings have maintained through the centuries the power of God to speak through dreams. From the 9th century BC prophet Joel to the first century story of the early church told in Acts, the promise from God reads:

“And afterward, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions.”³

Dreams and visions are promised to all. A dream is a vision given to us while we are asleep; a vision is a dream given while we are awake. God gives both for our healing and wholeness.

So, one of the first rule of dream analysis is only you can determine the meaning of your dream. Because only you know all the circumstances of your life to which your dream is speaking. To begin to analyze a dream, we need to know what has been going on in the dreamer’s waking life. For the purpose of biblical dreams, told in order to transmit meaning to us, we must know the context. What’s been going on in Jacob’s waking life to which this dream is speaking?

Jacob has just lied to his father and stolen his brother, Esau’s birthright. His mother was in on the conspiracy of deceit against her husband and fostering hostility between her sons. Esau, Jacob's brother, was so angry he vowed to kill Jacob, so Jacob fled for his life. The Bible is full of family drama like this. Prior to this dream Jacob is roaming the desert with a broken relationship with his family and far away from God. Jacob has wandered—literally far from home. His actions have led him far from God-,so he thinks.

Here he is. He took advantage of his brother. He deliberately deceived his blind father. He stole, lied and cheated his family. That is not behavior that makes for a good night’s sleep. He is on the run for his life. Night falls. He tries to slumber, but it is a restless night.

Ever have a night like that? Jacob doesn’t have any Tylenol PM. For most of us, we know what its like laying in bed, can’t sleep, going over the conflict all again. Wondering: Why did I say that? Why did I do that? How will I ever get out of this mess? God, please don’t let me get what I deserve this time! Maybe you’ve been there with a pillow that felt like a rock.

Finally, Jacob dozes off. He dreamed of a ladder, a stairway. It’s beautiful. It’s so tall! It rests on the earth and reaches all the way to the heavens! There are heavenly beings coming down and some going up. They have a foot on the earth, and they manage to touch the heavens. They are Messengers of God. Notice, Jacob is not climbing up the ladder, nor is God limbing down the ladder, at this point but “messengers” are going back and forth. This image given to Jacob in his dream to show he is beginning communication with God again. Jacob knows he’s a scoundrel; he knows he’s messed up. We know when we mess up. His sleeping is wondering if he has cut himself off from God. Jacob’s subconscious it tired of the lying and stealing and deceiving and running. Jacob’s heart wants to know God again. Jacob wants to be known by God again.

Then, his dream story continues : “And the Lord stood beside him and said, ‘I am the Lord, the God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac.... know that I am with you and will be with you wherever you go.’ Jacob woke from his sleep and said, “surely the Lord is in this place- and I did not know it!”

³ Joel 2:28, Acts 2:17

Our dreams are used by God to break down our walls of self-defense. They are produced through our subconscious minds. Our dreams go right to the truth of the matter and allow us to see the true motives and conditions of our hearts. Jacob's feet might have been running away, but his heart wanted to know God's presence. Our dreams cut through our defenses and give us the opportunity to listen to God and enter a whole new place of healing. God uses dreams and visions to open our ears.

We aren't always open to hearing God's voice because most of the time with our busy and hectic schedules. Only when we stop at night, are we defenseless to hear the small voice within that whispers in our heart.

We are not alone even when we might feel as though we are- even if we've made some less than stellar choices. (Remember: Jacob deceived, stole, lied, and cheated- and you know what, he will do it again) No matter what, in our waking, in our sleeping, our visions and our dreams, God whispers to our hearts,

I am with you..... wherever you go - I will never leave you.
my promises to you will be fulfilled!

Dreams come to us to offer healing and wholeness, full of many meanings, and doorways to the Divine. May you receive the messengers of God's grace and God's unending love and open your letter from God.

Amen.

Next week, we will see that Jacob didn't reach perfection even after this God-filled dream. He continued his old ways of deception and theft. So, another dream comes to him.

Next week, we will look at our dreams in which we Wrestle with our Inner Adversary. The story is just a few more pages into Genesis - chapter 32. If you want a preview, you can read ahead.