

*I was glad when they said to me,  
“let us go to the house of the LORD”. (Psalm 22:1)<sup>1,2</sup>*

Today - a Sunday in Pentecost, a Sunday in ordinary time - has special significance. Christ Church is open for worship! Let the church bells ring! (Will others hear them?) Due to an unprecedented situation - the pandemic - we last worshipped together in this space on March 8th, the 2nd Sunday in Lent. Reopening to worship became a moving target. Would it ever happen? We are witnesses today saying “Yes” - “Yes” it is happening! Whether physically present or not, we are all here in One Spirit. It is the spirit of the Lord. It is the Spirit of the Lord that hovers over us, that presses behind us and stands guard in front of us. The psalmist proclaims,

*Indeed, there is not a word on my lips, \*  
but you, Lord, know it altogether (Psalm 139:3).*

How reassuring, that in this time uncertainty, when we wrestle with too many unknowns, that God knows us, God knows our fears, worries and cares, and will hold us fast, not forsaking us. God knows our joys and delights and celebrates these with us.

Jacob wrestled with the consequences of his actions against his brother, Esau. Having fled Esau’s wrath and the divisions that Jacob created within his family, Jacob finds an unnamed place to rest for the night on his journey to his uncle, Laban. He dreams of a ladder that stretched from earth to heaven, on which God’s angels ascend and descend, performing tasks assigned to them by God. For Jacob, this ladder is “the gateway to heaven” (v. 17). This gateway to heaven allows God to communicate from heaven to people on earth. In his dream, Jacob is aware that God is communicating with *him*: God promises him the land of Canaan, where Jacob now rests, many progeny and God’s continued protection, not only on this journey, but in the future as well:

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<sup>1</sup> YrA\_7th\_Pentecost\_Pr11\_19July2020, Genesis 28:10-19a; Psalm 139:1-11, 22-23; Romans 8:12-15; Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43.

<sup>2</sup> Psalm 22:1

*“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” (v. 15).*

Jacob’s epiphany, the LORD standing beside him in the dream, is a pivot, a turning point for Jacob. His name means “to follow”, “to be behind”. Remember how Jacob grasped the heel of Esau as they were born. “Jacob” also means “to circumvent”, “to supplant (that is, to wrongfully take the place of another)”. However, in the presence of the LORD Jacob is awed and, thus, transformed. Because he is transformed he wants to commemorate the place of God’s presence. The stone slab that Jacob used for a pillow, is consecrated as a pillar to the sacredness of the site: “the house of God” - Bethel. God has established a covenant with Jacob, the basis of a long, multigenerational relationship between God and Jacob’s descendants.

The pillar at Bethel became a sacred shrine. Jacob had vowed return to Bethel for worship and thanksgiving, to the place where he encountered God most fully. So it is with many Christians, returning to church is our weekly journey to the place where we may encounter God more fully through worship, word, fellowship and sacrament.

*Eschatology* is a word with too many syllables; it doesn’t fall lightly on the ears. nor does it fall smoothly from the tongue. And its meaning doesn’t work in its favor either: *the part of theology concerned with death, judgment, and the final destiny of the soul and of humankind.*<sup>3</sup> In the parable of the Weeds, we see the nature of the church and the life of the world to come. As we are told, slaves of the household discover a dreaded weed among the newly sown wheat. The weed is the dreaded “bearded darnel”. In the time of Jesus, this weed had no virtues. First, its roots quickly became entwined with the roots of wheat, stealing vital nutrients. Second, it was almost impossible to untangle it from the true wheat without damaging the wheat plants. Third, it looked identical to wheat until it bore seeds, which caused everything from hallucinations to death, if ingested. Yum!

The slaves, understandably, want to get rid of the weeds as soon as possible. However, the householder, sees that gathering weeds too soon only damages the wheat;

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<sup>3</sup> [www.dictionary.com](http://www.dictionary.com)

when both plants have matured it will be easier to separate the two. More surprising is the householder's statement: "An enemy has done this". An enemy, whom he does not name, sowed weeds among the wheat while everyone was asleep. Thank God, Jesus was there to decode this. And very neatly, too:

The field = the world;

The good seed = children of the kingdom;

The weeds = children of the evil one;

The enemy who sowed them = the devil;

The harvest = the end of the age;

The reapers = the angels

Oh, and the one who sows the good seed = Jesus.

The tendency of the contemporary world is to dismiss the existence of evil, regarding it as "something" only primitive societies believe in or a leftover from the dark ignorance of the Middle Ages. Jesus clearly acknowledges the presence of evil. And he says this evil is intentional. Deliberate. And he names the one who perpetrates it. Jesus also knows that evil can infest the community itself. During the upheaval of my first semester of seminary, a classmate came to me and said "Evil has infected this community." This was not a melodramatic person. He was a pastor of a non-denominational church, with many years of experience. And he was absolutely correct. The scandals of the Church - sexual abuse, embezzlement, false testimony, abusive behavior toward clergy, abusive behavior toward parishioners - are examples evil that have infiltrated the sanctity of the Church.

We have heard Jesus warn against false messiahs and false prophets - those who cry "Lord, Lord" and seem faithful preaching and teaching the gospel, but create smoke screens that lead the people astray and fuel discord within the body of Christ. Jesus tells us that we can't always tell initially which is a good plant and which is not. In the end, it is all sorted out. Those who fall with the weeds will weep and gnash their teeth - eschatology, the end of time, the Day of Judgement: "*Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Let anyone with ears listen!*".

Let us pray,

Almighty God, we joyfully thank you for allowing us to be together again in this sacred and holy space; we pray for the “weeds” we may encounter in our lives, that they break way from the hold of the evil one and turn to the love of the true God, which shines for all to see; through Jesus, our Lord, working through the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

O God, you have bound us together in a common life: As the pandemic continues to affect all that we do, allow us to be models of the behavior that has been recommended by medical professionals, to decrease the infection rates and keep all persons safe, especially healthcare workers, the elderly and those in our congregations who can not return to church at this time; in the name of Jesus, we pray. Amen.