

Jan Hus Presbyterian Church and Neighborhood House
The Fifth Sunday after Pentecost; July 17, 2011

[Bulletin](#)

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Readings:

Genesis 28:10-19; Matthew 13:24-43

Sermon Notes:

Incredible, Wonderful, Holy

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Teaching Elder

“I am God, the God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac.” ... “I’ll stay with you. I’ll protect you wherever you go, and I’ll bring you back to this very ground. I’ll stick with you until I have done everything I promised you.”

These are the words of Jacob’s dream, as he watched angels of God going up and down a staircase. God’s messengers, angels; going about God’s work, carrying God’s message. This world connected to, awaiting the next.

God’s message to Jacob is in this dream is exceptionally powerful. The amount of trust God must have had in Jacob to promise him such things, being assured that Jacob would do what was right...

to receive such a promise from God.

Unlike with his father Abraham, there seems to be no inordinate test for Jacob to receive God’s assurance and trust. It seems Jacob had already earned it by this point.

Trust.

... a resident theme throughout the Bible.

This reading reminds me of another that is about trust and covenant.

Ruth and Naomi. You remember the story.

After Elimelech, Naomi’s husband dies, and then her two sons Mahlon and Chilion die, Naomi tells her daughters-in-law to return to their own homes and mothers and seek new husbands. Orpah, the woman married to Chilion does so, but Ruth remains, saying these familiar words to her mother-in-law:

“Do not urge me to leave you or to return from following you. For where you go I will go, and where you lodge I will lodge.

Your people shall be my people, and your God my God. Where you die I will die, and there will I be buried.”

From the Megillat Ruth, The Scroll of Ruth in Hebrew 1:16-17

Ruth and Naomi, Jacob, Abraham – these are just a few of the examples of the foundational aspects of *covenant* throughout these books and history of humankind.

Agreements, commitments, faithfulness, trustworthiness – these and others lift up the ways in which we are not only able to live together, but to discover our relationship to God and all that means.

And I say discover, because our relationship with God is already there. Whether we acknowledge it or not, know of it or not, we already have a “connection” to God.

Scripture and Jesus’ teaching in particular are all about this discovery process through his amazing works, parables, examples...

And aside from Jesus, whether through angels of God or the prophets or the teachings of or others ... the narratives are always about the great and wonderful promise of God, the Love of God, that is already there no matter what that has somehow been missed, ignored, forgotten, or disbelieved and lay undiscovered – yet, always nudging.

These writings, these worship gatherings of ours, are – if nothing else – about somehow strengthening the discovery and its renewal, adding to our faithfulness and desire to be faithful – seeking ways that bring us closer to knowing:

Knowing the power
Power of God’s encompassing power of God’s love and its healing
The promise of God sticking with us, through thick and thin,
and always coming through, helping us with our work in this kingdom of God
until time for the ultimate reunion.

I think Jesus articulates this clearly, in John 14 speaking to his disciples about things worry, sorrow, pain...:

¹⁻⁴ "Do not let your heart be troubled. You trust God, don't you? Trust me. There is plenty of room for you in my Father's home. If that weren't so, would I have told you that I'm on my way to get a room ready for you? And if I'm on my way to get your room ready, I'll come back and get you so you can live where I live."

The Greek syntax, from the original, is sort of like diagramming sentences, if you remember that from English class – but it goes like this:

No let be -- being disturbed of you -- the heart; be believing into God
and into me -- be believing

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“Be believing into God. Into. And into me.”

It’s an inside job. It sometimes begins in the head and moves deeply into our being, other times it starts deeply inside of us creeping into our thoughts in ways that can take a while to even know are there. Ultimately, we accept the difference between the two; between the head and the heart; as faith: as a covenant of trust; and as a refusal to let anything “trouble” us or make us “un-believing.”

We know this is not easy. Let’s face it; there is no book in any parts of the Bible called: “Done.” Or “They Got It.”

Instead the narratives go on...and on. And we read and reread.

There is a great sense of perseverance between its covers, don’t you think? A total lack of “giving-up” – except in the narratives about “giving-up” that are always turned around in the end – to, you guessed it – a lesson on perseverance and trust in God.

I don’t know why, but it seems that our human condition has always had trouble with certain things, for example needing to know what tomorrow will bring – and moving quickly.

Perhaps it is the sense of the limitation of our time on earth speeding us up – and the eternal life that is ahead struggling to eliminate the sense of finality [death]: and that they are always in some teeter-tottering, often painful, opposition – at the same time ever coming ever closer together.

We want what we want now – but at the same time want to be relieved of the burden of “wanting.” Intermittently we seek way of moving *into* the fullness, peace, and serenity of a spiritual life, suddenly and sometimes abruptly swung back into our own selves and our own fears.

Matthew’s retelling of Jesus’ stories this morning, most likely collected over time and presented as if they happened all in one afternoon, point to this over and over:

- Lesson: We will need to live with those who attempt to thwart us or distract us, such as the weeds or thistles among the wheat. Let them both grow. There will be time later to separate them, for to do so now – it is too easy to make mistakes. To pull up the wheat with the thistles, there's too great a chance of destroying both. Let them grow so we do not mistake one for the other. In time, it will all be easy to see.
- Lesson: God's kingdom grows over time; so much so that even the greatest of birds will find a home in its branches – so why shouldn't you. Relax, be patient, while the kingdom of God grows.
- Lesson: God's kingdom is like yeast worked into dough that over time transforms into loaves of barley. It takes time for the yeast to become loaves of barley.

Be patient. Do not be troubled. In time you will know the kingdom of God and all things will be as they have always been intended to be. Do not let “wars or rumors of wars” distract you. Stay on the path. You know the Way.

For sure, folks had their hard times back in those days. We really have limited history to attach to the early periods that is accurate. But from the teachings of Jesus and others and the topics that are addressed – it's clear their trouble, pain, turmoil, hopelessness, despair were a part of their lives, too.

Think about it, if this were not so, why would angels or messengers be among us now or then? Why would God send Jesus to teach us and be crucified to assure us through his resurrection that all this we see as so daunting – has been conquered, that there is more than you see and I see

and if God can survive the terrible, horrific, and painful execution of Jesus – to assure us that such things are true.

We can survive in such grace of God; we can have sorrow and turmoil and trouble and below, always, a deep and abiding peace, joy, and promise...now and then, but never lost.

Now the hard part.

My focus all week has returned over and over to the death of Leiby Kletzky, the eight year old that was abducted and murdered by surely a very sick person. The innocence of the child, the promise of what his future might have been, the life and love of a child taken so abruptly and violently

All week it has been with me, along with all the things it would make one would consider:

- what the child went through,
- what the family is dealing with
- the guilt and remorse of not being able to control – what cannot be controlled, no matter how much one troubles themselves otherwise;
- the repeated over and over what might have been done differently
- the family that has been fractured; will it heal as mine did when we lost our young brother...
- the years ahead of healing and coming to some time of peace...

And, the thought, of course... how could God allow this to happen. Even, with the added qualifier: “again.” “How could God have created such a monster that did such things?”

We all have experienced loss. I know the losses of some of us here. I know there will be one online friend of this congregation who will read this as she still works through the loss of her son because of medical errors by those who treated him.

Here, today, it would be easier to skim over the top of life, defining sanctuary – even this sanctuary – as a place where we are removed from reality; come here to sort of disappear into a vaulted “escape” that anesthetizes the pain; a pain that will start to throb again the moment Christian plays his last note in the postlude.

Clearly we don’t do that. We can’t. We can’t avoid or dismiss our world in which we are trying to find God’s will for us by reading and studying what others trying to do the same – did in their world amidst the tragedy and upheaval such horrendous violence produces.

And, we don’t have answers for why Leiby was taken, why the attacks of 9/11 took place, why loved ones are lost because of medical errors...

This is not about answers, at least not for us...but about ways for going forward. Yes, trusting in God.

What we do have are the words we read, such as this morning; the teachings we continue to discover in their meaning and depth; and the promise of a risen Jesus that even the most heinous of acts against the most innocent cannot hold us from the love of God or the love of God from us. And we have one another in a community – believing together. Jesus told us, where two or more are gathered in my name, so too am I.

None of this is to say *any of this* is easy.

But it is to say that we can rely on the covenant that God has made with us, we really can, just as with God’s covenants in the past.

We can rely on the presence of God and one another;

We can rely on the teachings we study and attempt to practice in our own lives;
we can rely on these things and as on the road to Emmaus, for God to walk with
us in the pain and suffering, ...

knowing that there is only “Incredible, Wonderful, and Holy” ahead for us,
the “Incredible, Wonderful, and Holy” that those who have already transitioned
now embrace,

regardless of any way in which their transition was made.

It is a matter of faith – filling in the gap between the head and the heart with trust in God.
It is stronger at times and weaker at others, but it never leaves us.

It is always there to be rekindled,
getting us through with even the smallest of its embers aglow,
promising that where we go, God will go.
That the covenant is intact and stronger than anything that might threaten it.
That, God is always with us –

So, knowing these things, believing this things join me in calling on God for The Klebsky
family and all those you hold dear;
calling on God for the strength to get through these toughest of days,
and to have joy for those now in God’s “Incredible, Wonderful, and Holy” care –
receiving the peace in knowing this is so

And above all things

Let us continue to pray and discover the Incredible, Wonderful, and Holy in our midst.
Always.

Amen.