



The Inclusive Community

Nineteenth Sunday Ordinary Time

Genesis 28:10-19a

Theme: Jake-In-The-Box

August 7, 2011

Homily of Rev. Dr. George H. McDonald

Recently, I have come to realize that we all tell ourselves a story about ourselves and the world around us. Then, having created this little world in our mind, we each proceed to live in that world we created. Consciously or unconsciously, that picture includes our understanding of God, the universe, and ourselves.

However, as my wonderful mantra so marvelously demonstrates, we actually know very little any of those. Jacob was no different.

Obviously, we don't know much about Jake's world-view, but we get a lot of information from the biblical story.

His father, Isaac was, at least in my mind, THE #1 wimp of the bible. About the only significant thing he did was fill in the gap between his father and his son, so people could talk about the patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

Abraham did arrange for Isaac to marry Rebecca, who was one sharp and clever lady. She gave birth to twins: Esau, the eldest, covered with red hair from his birth, and Jacob, which means "Heel-grabber," clutching Esau's foot as they were born.

We read: When the boys grew up, Esau was a skillful hunter, a man of the field ... Isaac loved Esau, because he was fond of game -- Do you remember Esau selling his birthright to Jacob for a bowl of stew? But, Jake was a quiet man, living in tents... And Rebekah loved Jacob. Jake was mamma's boy -- cunning, astute -- living by his wits, not his strength or skill.

When Jacob and his mother tricked Isaac into giving the blessing of the first-born to Jacob instead of his older brother, Esau, Isaac didn't get it. But Esau was ready to kill his younger brother.

So Jake, with mamma's help, quickly left town. They said he was going to visit Rebecca's brother, Laban, to find a wife. Actually, he was trying to save his own skin!

Soon, Jake would meet his match in Laban. For 21 years, they went back and forth, trying to out-cheat the other. Jake finally left with both of Laban's daughters as his wives, the wives' two servants as his concubines, and a vast herd of animals.

That was later. In today's story, Jake is traveling light, somewhere on the road between Beer-sheba (where his family lived) south-west of Jerusalem to Haran, (where Laban lived) in what is now Turkey.

It is never mentioned in the Bible, but Jake carried a very important item with him. I know that, because we all carry one of them around with us all the time – a box, so light-weight, it can be folded up and tucked behind our left ear, which is where Jake kept his. The box was Jake's self-story; his world-view; his understanding of who he was; the role he learned to play from his society; his picture of Reality. Of course, Reality is always larger than any of us ever realized. Jake slept in his box. In the same way, each of us can become much more than we can imagine.

Normally we use our story about Reality to guide us in the world – whom to be courteous to, whom to be afraid of, whom we are better than. It tells us how to behave, which rules we must obey and which ones we can cheat on, a little bit.

Sometimes we use our story, our understanding of Reality to defend our self from Reality as Reality really is! from God! But on this particular night, out in the middle of nowhere, far away from family and friends, all alone – Jacob saw a ramp coming toward him all the way in from Eternity, from Reality Itself, from God.

Jake realized he didn't need all those social roles, all those personality quirks, any more. He was here all alone. He put his box down, and Behold! he saw three messengers, moving back and forth on the ramp.

The first angel Jake met was Freedom. Like everyone else, Jacob was far more than his habits, his idiosyncrasies, his past. As he embraced Freedom, he was free to decide, not who he had been, but who he would to become. No longer was he just Esau's little brother, Isaac's boy. He could be grateful to his past, but, just as he did with his box, he could lay aside his past, and be his own person!

And he was filled with Awe, for he had been struck by Awe, by God. We could say he was filled with the Holy Spirit, and we would be right. He received Freedom, the first angel – God's gift to him. And he sent it back up the ramp. As his gift to God. Jake was FREE. NO! It was more than that. Jake was Freedom itself.

For Jake also embraced a second messenger – the angel of Trust. In trust, Jake could open himself to being the Spirit-filled one he had just become. Reality had not made a

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mistake in making him free. The Divine Mystery was trustworthy. No longer did he need to fear it, to defend himself against Reality as it really was. The Source of all Awe, was Jake's papa, momma, brother, friend, lover, shepherd, guard and guide, all wrapped up in one; Jake's rock, his refuge, his fortress and his foundation. The messenger of Trust transformed this frightened boy leaving home for the first time, into a confident boy, still clever, cunning and astute, willing to be his Trust, his Freedom, his power to carve out a life for himself, to marry, to become skilled at work, to grapple with his conniving uncle, to meet and reconcile with his angry brother, to become the father of a spirit community. He could become TRUST, as a gift to God, to humanity, to the universe!

There was yet another angel on the ramp, LOVE. You know, sometimes box dwellers can be very defensive, often malicious. Jesus called people to come out of their boxes, to be Free, to Trust Reality, to live in Love. But those who remain in their boxes do not like the implication that their box is ungodly. So they killed Jesus!

But we were not created to be malicious. We have been created for community, for compassion, for love. Genesis, chapter 2 suggests that man and woman, although opposite from each other, might make each other complete. That's not a story about sex. It's about overcoming loneliness, about living in companionship and love. Today it is Being the Body of Christ!

Compassion is who we are. We don't have to try to be loving. We just have to give up living in our boxes. The "real me" is Spirit Love, a love that affirms all beings, all of creation.

As long as Jake had to make something out of himself, to achieve something, to be someone, he was into self-promotion. As long as we are into self-promotion, we are being malicious. But our "true self" is not malicious, defensive, or self-promoting. Our "Jesus-Self" is a realistic servant, a leader of others, perhaps, but a servant leader. For a Real Self does not need recognition or praise.

In other words, being fully our Spirit Being entails being dead to our self, to our ego, to our personality. Paul wrote in as many ways as he could, "We were crucified with Christ that we might also be raised up with him to newness of life."

What is being killed here is the illusion that the story I tell about who I am is, in fact, the Real Me. Real life, abundant life, eternal life, means death to living in my box.

And resurrection is being on this ramp from here to Eternity, being Trust, being Freedom, being Compassion. These are our higher angels. We don't have to create

them. They are already the real you, the real me. All that is required of us is surrender, to being who we really are. In the name of the Divine Reality who made us to be at one

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with all of creation, just as God already is. Amen.

DR. GEORGE H. MCDONALD