

Jacob and Peter lived more than a thousand years apart. And it may not seem like they have all that much in common, but they actually do, because in our readings today from the Old Testament and from the Gospel, they have a similar experience. Both of them meet God when they least expected to do so.

Because Jacob, on the one hand, was a man on the run. He was heading away from Beersheba because of the things that he had done. Jacob had deceived his father Isaac and had deceived his brother Esau, because he had stolen the blessing that belonged to his brother. And Esau was understandably quite angry, and he was threatening to kill his brother Jacob as soon as their father was dead. And so Jacob was running away to the north, heading towards Haran, towards his mother Rebecca's family, and he hoped while he was there that he would find a wife and find a new life away from his brother. The journey was not short, though. The distance from Beersheba to Haran was several hundred miles, and he was going that entire distance on foot. It would take some time before he got there.

But a few days into his journey, he came to a certain place. The sun was setting, and he needed a place to sleep. He didn't have anywhere else that he could go. There wasn't any time. And so in that place out there in the wilderness, he took a stone and turned it into his pillow. He was not expecting to meet anybody out there. It was just a place to spend the night. It was nothing special to Jacob. It was just one stop on his way to Haran.

Centuries later, we meet Peter, also heading north. But he is traveling with Jesus. They're going up on top of a high mountain, probably Mount Herman in the furthest north part of the holy land. But which mountain it was ultimately doesn't matter. But this also was nothing extraordinary for Peter. Jesus very often went up on top of mountains in order to pray, and he frequently took his disciples with him when he did. So I'm sure that Peter on that day didn't think anything of it. This was just something usual, just a new spot to do it. They would go up onto the mountain. They would pray. They would come back. It was nothing special. It was just another day with Jesus.

But nothing could have prepared them, either of them, for what would happen next. Jacob slept, we are told, and he saw a great vision in a dream: a great ladder set up on the earth with its base on the ground and its tops in the highest heavens. And the angels of God, we are told, were coming up and down on this ladder. This was a great angelic highway, the means by which they went back and forth from heaven to earth. It was the great link between them. This was the pathway to God. And above it, we are told, Jacob saw a vision of God himself. God appeared to Jacob on that night. He met Jacob when Jacob didn't expect to find anyone.

Peter also was not prepared for what he saw Jesus was transfigured before him. Jesus' clothes became as white as light, whiter than any clothing here on earth. His face began to shine like the sun in all of its strength in the glory of God. Two others also appeared with Jesus, Moses and Elijah, the two greatest prophets of the Old Testament, who were now living with God forever in glory. And they were talking to Jesus about what was about to happen. So Peter went up on that mountain expecting to pray as usual, but instead he met God in all of his power and majesty.

Both of them were afraid, we are told, and understandably so. If God appeared to us right now in all of his power and all of his glory, we would be afraid too. Not just because it'd be a surprise, although that's certainly part of it. But because seeing God as he is would cause us great fear.

Seeing God in all of his perfection, in all of his purity, in all of his holiness would make us realize just how sinful we actually are. Seeing something so clean, so to speak, would make us realize just how dirty we are, how little we deserve to stand before God. And so Jacob was afraid because of the weight of his sins. I'm sure he felt very keenly in that moment the deceptions that he had done to his father and to his brother. And Peter also was afraid because he just wasn't sure what to do. What can you do in the presence of the all holy God? Both of them were terrified. God was in that place, and they did not know it!

But God spoke to both of them. God brought them a message and a promise. God told Jacob that he would surely bless him, that the land that he was sleeping on would be his and his descendants forever. It was the same promise that God had made to Abraham his grandfather, and the same promise that God had made to Isaac his father. The blessing of Abraham would go through Jacob to the entire world. Through Jacob would come the blessing for all people. And God would not fail in that promise, because the promise did not depend on Jacob. It depended only on God. Verse 15 of our reading says: "Behold, I am with you, and I 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." I will do this. I will keep it. I will do what I have promised. God bases this all on himself and what he's going to do so. So Jacob had no reason to fear what would come. Jacob had no reason to fear even his brother Esau. Jacob could know that he was going to come back to this land, even as he was running away from it. All of these things showed that God would not only protect Jacob, but he would do what he had promised to do. Through him would come the great hope and blessing of the entire world.

And for Peter on the mountain all those years later, he saw the fulfillment of that promise. Because he heard a voice coming out from the cloud: "This is my beloved Son. Listen to him!" God was not telling Peter something that he didn't already know. Just six days previous, Peter had said the exact same thing, that Jesus was the Son of the living God. This was something he already knew. But what God meant when he said this is that this was the fulfillment of the promise. This is everything that he had been pointing towards. Saying that this is my beloved Son is like saying that here is the offspring of Jacob. Here is the great blessing of the world. Here is the one that you have been expecting for so long. God has now come into the world. Jesus is the one through whom all the families of the earth will be blessed.

Because Jesus is Jacob's ladder, Christians. Jesus himself makes that perfectly clear when he says in John chapter 1: "Truly, truly, I say to you, you will see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man." Jesus being Jacob's ladder means that he is the connection between heaven and earth. In Jesus we have every blessing. In Jesus we have salvation. In Jesus we have assurance in the midst of every fear. In Jesus we have comfort in the midst of every grief. Jesus is the way to the Father. Jesus is the open ear that hears every prayer. Jesus is the way that our sins are forgiven. Jesus is the way that we are made right with God. Apart from him, there is no way to heaven, but through him we have peace with God.

Therefore, Christians, if you are burdened with sin, come to Jesus. He will take away that burden. If you are afraid, come to Jesus. He will calm your fears. If you are sad, come to Jesus. He will wipe away all your tears. If you are grieving, come to Jesus, because he will comfort you and give you life. If you are happy, come to Jesus, and he will make you happier still. Whatever situation you may find yourselves in, whatever you may be feeling, come to Jesus, because he is

the source of every blessing. He is the link between heaven and earth. Here is the gate of heaven, Christians. Jesus is the way to the Father. Come to him, and you will find every good thing in him!

Let us pray. Lord Jesus Christ, our dearest treasure and our highest joy, we give you thanks that you have come to us as the Way and the Truth and the Life, and we pray that you would lead us to ever look to you in every circumstance, because you are the source of every blessing; for you live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.