

Sermon Title: **“Surely the Lord is in this place - and I did not know it!”**

Bible: **Genesis 28:10-19a**

Where & When: at Gilroy UMC on Sunday, July 19, 2020

Audience: about 25 YouTube Live-streaming viewers

## **Opening Prayer**

Merciful God, during this difficult time, we look for you, Lord. We need you. As you were with Jacob, please open our eyes to see your presence and your protection. Please be with my lips in your love and grace. In Jesus' name. Amen.

## **1. Jacob's Life**

Today's Genesis scripture reading came from the lectionary, for the 7th Sunday after Pentecost. Jacob is one of the popular characters in the Bible. I believe that you have some friends named Jacob. Jacob was one of the great faith ancestors. Matthew 22:32 says, “I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob”? He is God not of the dead, but of the living.” Jacob was one of the three with Abraham and Isaac. However, when we read the life of Jacob in the Bible, it has many questionable stories, even before his birth. Jacob had struggled with his twin brother Esau in his mother's womb. When he was born, he gripped his brother's heel. The Hebrew word heel is the motivation for the name Jacob, because “heel” in Hebrew sounds like Jacob. Jacob was not that honest. Jacob lied to his father Isaac, to take over his brother's blessing. So, he was afraid of his brother's anger. He loved a woman, Rachel, so much, but he might not be a good husband, as he had four wives. He might not be a good father,

either. He had 12 sons and 1 daughter. 10 sons tried to kill his beloved son, Joseph. Fortunately or unfortunately, Joseph was sold by his brothers as a slave to Egypt. But 10 sons lied to their father, Jacob. Jacob believed that his son Joseph was killed by a wild animal. Jacob refused to be comforted, because of his loving son's death. I cannot imagine the loss of a child.

After a long time, Jacob met Joseph in Egypt, according to God's plan. Jacob was brought in to Pharaoh. In Genesis 47:9, Jacob introduced himself to Pharaoh, "The years of my earthly sojourn are one hundred thirty; few and hard have been the years of my life. They do not compare with the years of the life of my ancestors during their long sojourn."

## **2. Jacob's Dream at Bethel**

Jacob mentioned that his years have been few and difficult. The story of Jacob's dream at Bethel, today's Genesis reading, was one of the moments when Jacob was hopeless and desperate. Esau planned to kill Jacob, because Jacob took away his blessing. Jacob escaped from his brother Esau's anger. This meant that he had to leave his home for a foreign land where he had not been before. He just needed to flee from his brother. Because his brother became so angry, probably, he did not have enough time to pack. He used a stone as his pillow. He was alone. He was not ready for this desperate situation. But he deserved it, because he made a big mistake with his brother. Probably he was not able to pray to God. If you were him, would you dare to pray to God?

At the most vulnerable moment, God appeared to Jacob in a dream. This was Jacob's first encounter with God. I do not think that Jacob was a good person. I do not think that what Jacob did to his brother was understandable. Even though I try to understand his situation, I feel that

he was a cheater. He made a big mistake not by accident, but on purpose. Nevertheless, God revealed God-self to Jacob, not to punish him, but to protect him. "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." (Genesis 28:15) With my logic, I cannot understand God's protection of Jacob. How about you? Can you understand God in this story? Why does God appear to Jacob and promise to protect Jacob? It does not make sense to me. But isn't it God's mercy and love? I know that God's grace looks like that. I cannot put God in my small box. In many times, God's mercy, God's love, and God's grace cannot be inside of my small box. So, it is God's moment, divine revelation.

### **3. "The Lord is in this place - and I did not know it!"**

We are in July 2020. I remember the first Sunday of this year. It was full of joy and hope. But during this COVID-19 time, since then, it feels like 7 years have passed, not just 7 months. This 7 years' feeling cannot be compared with the years of your life and the life of our ancestors: World War I and II, the Great Depression and financial crisis, pandemics, sexism and racism, family problems, health issues like cancer, surgery, car accidents and disasters, unexplainable or sudden death of our family members or friends, and so on. Sometimes, our years have been difficult. At the most vulnerable moment in your life, what did you pray? Could you pray? Did you see God? How about this time? Is it your most vulnerable moment? I try to learn and face this uncertain time. Occasionally, I feel exhausted with daily changing numbers and guidelines. I give up on following the numbers and guidelines. I just take a nap. I wish that God appeared to me in a dream while I was sleeping like in Jacob's story. It is not easy for me to focus on God at

this time. Last Monday evening, July 13, the church had the first meeting of the Relaunching Team. At the end of this meeting, I almost cried. To me, our nine relaunching team members feel like the angels of God in the ladder between heaven and earth. While I talked with them about our church, our worship, and our church members, it was not just talking, but also praying. I felt God's touch and God's presence.

We have smartphones, wifi, and high technology. We thought that with our knowledge and technology, we could do everything. But in front of the invisible virus, we are so vulnerable. We are so fragile. It is okay if you feel lonely. It is okay if you make mistakes. It is okay if you cannot pray. It is fine to accept underserved and unmerited gifts. What God wants is for us to accept God's unconditional love. Please remember that God will reveal God-self to you, as God did to Jacob. That's because God is our Lord. We all are the children of God. God's love is bigger than anything else, including ourselves. God might have sent the angels to you already. God's mercy and grace may already be with you and me!

### **Closing Prayer**

O Lord, in this time, we remember your promise to be with us and protect us. At the most vulnerable moment, you come to us and reveal yourself to us. Please guide us to open our eyes and ears to your presence. In Jesus' name. Amen.