

“Elevators”

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Have you ever thought about what our world would be like if we didn't have elevators? I doubt any of us would be gathered in this room today for worship, as I suspect we all used an elevator to get here. Elevators have changed and will continue to change the way we live. Elevators allow us to ascend to new heights and reach levels we may never have otherwise imagined. Elevators can take us to a place where we can view things from different perspective. They can even help us overcome barriers that once stood in our way.

I think that sooner or later in life, every one of us find ourselves in need of a lift. Maybe literally as we walk onto an elevator and push the button to the desired floor to which we seek to ascend. But also figuratively. In life there are times when we need to be elevated. Times when we need to be brought to higher place not only physically, but emotionally, relationally and spiritually. That we might find ourselves with a different view of life, of the world around us and of the ones around us. There are always times when we need an elevator.

Jacob was in such a place in his life when we first encounter him in this text this morning. I imagine that upon hearing this text some of you might have started humming that old Sunday School song “We Are Climbing Jacob's Ladder.”

Well Jacob needed that ladder because he needed some physical, emotional and spiritual elevation. At the beginning of this text, we meet Jacob, a young man who at one time had been filled with so much promise, but now he has hit the bottom floor of his life. Jacob's condition is to the point that when he beds down to sleep, the cold hard ground is his mattress and a stone is his pillow.

It must have been tough for Jacob to have been out on his own like this. After all, he really had been the home body, he wasn't the outgoing hunter like his brother Esau. Jacob was

the one who would stay back and do the cooking. To have been forced to leave those comfortable surroundings and to lose it all, to the point that Jacob has to make his bed on the ground with a stone for a pillow is highly significant. This was a man who seemingly has nothing left. One would think that he could have found some place where someone would have taken him or that he could have found some shelter. Yet there he was, laying on the ground. Jacob was in the midst of an emotional, a relational and a spiritual recession.

Jacob's downfall was that in spite of attempting to elevate himself over his brother, he hadn't elevated his thinking. His vision was one-dimensional. It consisted of what was in front of him, what he could see for himself. Sometimes we refer to this kind of vision as being concerned with the imminent. Now don't get me wrong, it's important to consider the imminent and take in account what we see before us. Yet our vision and our thinking needs to be more than just horizontal. In life, we also need a vision that is vertical, it is a vision that takes into account the "transcendent" or higher things. Jacob had the horizontal view. His was a shallow existence that dwelled on the surface of living. Jacob was in need of a lift. Many humans suffer from the same condition that afflicts Jacob in this story. It's the condition of allowing only the imminent and the immediate to guide and direct one's thinking and attitude.

Yet, as humans have recognized for ages, we have always been in need of a lift. It was Bernard of Chartres back in the 12th century who said "we are ones who stand on the shoulders of giants." Bernard knew that there have always been ones who have sought to elevate us and lift us up to see further and consider more than the sphere of our immediate lives. We stand on the shoulders of one's whose faith has lifted us up.

This is the kind of elevation that Jacob receives when he has his dream at Beth-El. When God comes to Jacob in his dream in which he sees the angels that ascend to heaven and then come to earth. Jacob is being reminded that his life and his world consists of more than just one dimension...his life is more than the here and now. There is a transcendent God that seeks

to raise him. It is the God who identifies himself to Jacob as “the God of Abraham your Father and the God of Isaac.” This is important to note because when God speaks to Jacob, even though it is Isaac who is his actual father, God names Abraham as being Jacob’s father.” Abraham being the father of the faith, the one with whom God made the initial covenant. Jacob is being lifted onto the shoulders of Abraham with a vision that is meant to transcend his present broken state of his humanity, with the vision of a life shaped by faith.

You can see further in all directions when you have been lifted up. It is the long view God wants Jacob to have in mind. That his offspring shall be as plentiful as the dust of the earth. God does not want Jacob to perish or merely survive. Through the faith of his ancestors and his relationship with the living God who will always be with him, he will flourish. Yet this is not something that will happen immediately. Jacob has to trust and believe that this is something that moves him beyond his immediate life.

As a people of faith, one of the things we are called to recognize is our need to be elevated. We have a need to consider the transcendent. Like a budding plant that pushes its way through the soil in search of the light and warmth of the sun, we too are called to break through the surface of our living to consider the other dimensions of our emotional, spiritual and physical well-being. This break through allows us to grow as individuals and as human beings. To ascend.

The Jewish people have always kept this in mind when they would make their pilgrimages to Jerusalem and to visit the Temple Mount. Some of you will recall when we were in the Holy Land, that when we got on the road to Jerusalem, we spent some time on the bus ride reading what are known in the Book of Psalms as the Psalms of Ascent. You see Jerusalem, is in an elevated place and as one journeys to it from a distance, one goes up to Jerusalem. Faithful Jews have always made reciting the Psalms of Ascent as a part of the pilgrimage. There is this belief of ascending into the presence of God. They read passages like Psalm 121 that

reads “I lift up my eyes to the hills.” But their ascension isn’t only because of the changes in the physical elevation of the land, the people recognize the way that they have been elevated because of God’s relationship to them.

You know it’s like the story of the man who one day while visiting New York City, entered an elevator in a luxury hotel where they still had elevator operators to take people from floor to floor. When the man got on the elevator he said to the operator, ‘Take me to the 19th floor.’ When the elevator reached its destination, the elevator operator opened the door and said, ‘The 19th floor, son.’ ‘Why did you call me son?’ demanded the passenger. ‘I am not your son.’ The operator replied, ‘I called you son because I brought you up,’

My friends, I pray that this is something that we all remember as a people of faith. That as we look back on the stories of our traditions and as we look at the lives of so many men and women of faith who when they found themselves at the lowest points in their living, when life seemed limited, they discovered a God who promised to bring them up.

Knowing what and who has brought us up is a part of that multi-dimensional view that we benefit from as a people of faith. As Christians we remember and give thanks for Christ who was lifted up in his humanity and his divinity in order that we might participate in this view. Not we might be elevated to set ourselves above others, but in order that we might see others lifted up by the same love that led to Christ’s resurrection. Because as Christians we are meant to be elevators too. Elevators for one another, elevators for friend and stranger, elevators for ones in need, for the physically and spiritually impoverished, for the afflicted for ones who find themselves at the bottom. As the apostle Paul says in his letter to the Colossians, “set your minds on things above, not on earthly things.”

Paul knew what Jacob learned along with those Jerusalem pilgrims who recall the Psalms of ascent. It something that we all find ourselves realizing at some point in our lives.

And that is this, we need a lift, everyone needs an elevator. God knows this too and has lifted up Christ that we may be lifted up through him.