



On August 6, we will commemorate World Peace Sunday in worship with music, liturgical gesture, and liturgical art. Part of this will involve a congregational project with the goal of folding 1000 peace cranes out of paper.

We will also have an art exhibit in the Narthex in conjunction with World Peace Sunday and we need your help! If you have created any art or own any art that coincides with the themes of peace and love, please get in touch with Alex at alexr@countrysideucc.org.

## COUNTRYSIDE COMMUNITY CHURCH

13130 FAITH PLAZA | OMAHA, NE 68144 | 402-391-0350  
COUNTRYSIDEUCC.ORG

REV. DR. KEITH HERRON



# PLAYBILL®

CountrySide Community Church  
OMAHA, NE

*Summer Sermon Series*

**GENESIS**

# THE FIRST STORIES

*The First Stories: Sweet Dreams*

*July 23, 2023*

*Genesis 28:10-19a*

# SYNOPSIS

*Today, we see a man on a journey, alone. At day's end, he lies down to sleep in a desolate rocky place using a stone for a pillow. During the night he dreams of a staircase extending from earth to heaven, and on it, angels ascending and descending. He dreams that the LORD stands beside him, promising the land on which he lies and numerous offspring, saying, "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 promised you."*

*This is Jacob, born moments after his twin brother Esau, to Isaac and Rebecca.*

*Beginning in the womb, the twins struggled with each other; they differed in appearance, temperament, and interests. Each was preferred by a different parent.*

*Once Esau came home, famished, from a hunting trip, asking Jacob for some of the stew he was cooking. Jacob would only grant this request in exchange for Esau's birthright. (Birthright gave extra rights to the firstborn son, granting him leadership within the family and a double share of inheritance). Esau was so hungry that it seemed a small price to pay, so he agreed, a decision he came to regret as the years passed.*

*Nearing death, Isaac asked Esau to hunt game and prepare a final savory meal for him before receiving the blessing. Overhearing this request, Rebecca made a plan to trick Isaac into blessing Jacob instead. She prepared Isaac's favorite food, gave Jacob some of Esau's clothing, and made sleeves of animal skins. Isaac was nearly blind, but smelling the scent of Esau's clothing and feeling Esau's hairy arms convinced him that this was indeed Esau. The blessing was given to Jacob, disguised as Esau. (Ancients believed that deathbed blessings released an irrevocable power to determine the destiny of the recipient.)*

*When Esau learned what had happened, he vowed to kill Jacob. But again, Rebecca learned of this plan and intervened. In order to protect Jacob, she convinced Isaac to send the younger son to Haran, more than 100 miles away, to find a wife among Rebecca's kinsfolk. Which brings us back to today's story of a man journeying alone in the wilderness between Beersheba and Haran, fleeing his brother's wrath, and meeting God on his way to a new life.*

# JOYS AND CONCERNS

*Join us as we pray for our congregation members and their loved ones who are on our Joys and Concerns list every week on Thursdays at 9:00 a.m. in the Sanctuary. If you have someone who would benefit from prayer, want to share a joy or be included on the bulletin list and/or on Countryside's Prayer Chain, contact Rev. Sarah Rentzel Jones at 402-391-0350, ext. 225 or [sarahrj@countrysideucc.org](mailto:sarahrj@countrysideucc.org)*

## JOYS:

We continue to celebrate PRIDE month and rejoice in the participation of congregational members in the Heartland Pride Parade & Festival as well as a beautiful PRIDE-themed worship service held last week! Let us continue to promote and celebrate God's gracious inclusion of all people and to strive to be as inclusive to others as God is to each of us.

## CONCERNS:

**Joan Denton** continues to recover from her surgical procedure. Please continue to pray for her strength and healing.

Please pray for **Joyce Dixon Kidd**, whose husband, John Kidd, passed away in Tucson, Arizona, on Saturday, July 15. If you would like to send her a card, her address is 8528 N. Nob Hill, Tucson, AZ 85742.

Prayers for our dear long-distance members, **Larry and Mary Jo Weiss**. Larry has been having tests run this week and will meet with his oncologist next week to determine how to move forward.

***We continue to pray weekly for the Pastoral Search Committee, as they continue in their discernment towards calling Countryside's next Settled Pastor. We appreciate all the time and effort the PSC is putting into this process, and we continue to hold them in prayer.***

# MUSIC NOTES:

In the end, the song tells us: even if people don't learn, that doesn't mean you don't have to. "So pay attention, observe and learn to love nature, and keep it moving forward!"

Scholars have noted the inspiration that Celtic writing, esotericism, and spirituality had on the lyrics, weaving one of the most compelling narratives in musical storytelling. Critic Dario Giardi writes:

"Robert Plant wanted to guide us on a sort of spiritual journey, to help improve ourselves and the people around us. And those who hesitate and are watchful ("Those who stand looking"), could be those with a conservative outlook, who disapprove of this kind of spiritual journey because they are imprisoned in societal materialism, unable to look forward. But, just when we least expect it, we will be called to live in peace and harmony, at one with nature and each other ("And it's whispered that soon If we all call the tune / Then the piper will lead us to reason")."

Whether the story of Jacob's Ladder had any influence on the lyrics isn't clear, but isn't likely - at least not a significant influence other than the imagery of the stairway to heaven in the lyrics. The idea of divine ascent exists in Celtic spirituality which clearly influenced the lyrics, as well as in most religions' theology or sacred stories.

Certainly, the imagery is relatable to faith. British Theologian Paul Louis Metzger relates the lyrics to a story about Martin Luther:

"Do we try to buy a stairway to heaven (regardless of our conception of heaven) because we feel unworthy and are anxious about our eternal destiny? Is it because we possess self-confidence and believe we have the resources to make it on our own? Whether it is anxiety and despair on the one hand or pride on the other hand, we fail to see that entrance to heaven is not based on our ascent but the divine descent. What do I mean? Clutch the step or hold on to the wrung of the ladder you're ascending and I'll unpack what I mean.

Martin Luther realized the need for the divine descent a long time ago. The story goes that Luther climbed the Scala Sancta (Holy Stairs) during his visit to Rome. According to Roman Catholic tradition, these stairs were the steps on which Jesus walked at the time of his trial before Pilate (the stairs were supposedly brought from Jerusalem to Rome in the fourth century).

Luther had supposedly climbed the stairs on his knees in the hope of being relieved of his burden in seeking assurance of God's mercy and forgiveness. I can even imagine Luther kissing those steps. He would have kissed anything, tried anything to accumulate enough merit to make it to heaven. We are told that somewhere on his climb Luther realized that it is not our merit that saves us, but Christ's merit and Christ's descent from heaven."

Of course that realization led Luther to reference Jacob's ladder in his discourses regarding Salvation by Grace, a major component of the Reformation.

# CAST AND SCENES

## CAST

**JACOB, SECOND-BORN TWIN SON OF  
ISAAC AND REBECCA**

**THE LORD, GOD OF ABRAHAM AND ISAAC**

## SCENES

- 1. NIGHTFALL JACOB LIES DOWN TO SLEEP, HIS HEAD RESTING ON A STONE**
- 2. JACOB DREAMS OF A STAIRWAY TO HEAVEN, ANGELS GOING UP AND DOWN, AND A BLESSING FROM THE LORD**
- 3. JACOB WAKES, SAYING, "SURELY THE LORD IS IN THIS PLACE, AND I DIDN'T KNOW IT!"**
- 4. MORNING. JACOB CONSECRATES THE STONE PILLOW, SETS IT UP AS A PILLAR, AND NAMES THE PLACE BETHEL (HOUSE OF GOD)**

# FOR DEEPER THOUGHT

- Jacob knows the story of his grandfather's journey of faith, and that his father prays to the LORD in times of need. But until this episode, God doesn't seem to be a reality for Jacob. When did God become REAL to you? What made you receptive to God's presence? Did that awareness change you? How?
- Jacob's story is filled with intrigue, sibling rivalry, parental favoritism, conspiracy, deception, hatred, and more. But this flawed human being plays a crucial role in fulfilling God's promise to Abraham. Does God working through fallible people puzzle or distress you, make you laugh, fill you with hope? Why?
- Biblical writers emphasize the significance of names and their meanings. When naming your children, do you choose descriptive or aspirational names? What does your name mean? Does it fit your understanding of who, or whose, you are?

## Order of Worship

### **Gathering**

Prelude:

*Meditation on Jacob's Ladder* - Randolph Johnston

Words of Welcome / † Mission Statement

Rev. Dr. Keith Herron

Announcements

Emma Boyd

Examen

Emma Boyd

Examen Meditation:

Entr'acte from *Jacob's Ladder* - Brad Meldau

Call to Worship

Bruce Blanchard

### **Hearing God's Word**

Children's Church

Rebecca Morello

Musical Reflection:

*Stairway to Heaven* - Jimmy Page / Robert Plant

Scripture:

Genesis 28:10-19a

Bruce Blanchard

Reflection

Rev. Dr. Keith Herron

Musical Meditation:

*Dream* - Imagine Dragons

### **Responding to God's Word**

Communion

Rev. Dr. Keith Herron

† Hymn:

*Come Let Us Dream God's Dream*

Pastoral Prayer and Lord's Prayer

Rev. Sarah Rentzel Jones

The Basket

Musical Reflection:

*Dream When You're Feeling Blue* - Johnny Mercer

Countryside Blessing

Kyle Barchus

Postlude:

*Night Dreamer* - Wayne Shorter

OUR WORSHIP HAS CONCLUDED.

NOW OUR SERVICE BEGINS.

† Indicates those places where those who are able  
are invited to stand.

Julia Olynyk, vocals - Matt Wallace, sax - Rick Avard, piano  
Alex Ritter, piano - Carlos Figueroa, drums

## Who We Are:

We are an inclusive, open and affirming family of faith,  
welcoming all to God's table of love and acceptance.

We are diverse, yet united by Christ's example.

We care for one another, support one another and  
challenge one another to become all that God creates us to be.

We work together to nurture our community and  
to promote peace, equality and justice in our conflicted world.

## MUSIC NOTES:

Brad Meldau's *Jacob's Ladder* is a set of compositions that reflect on scripture and the search for God through music inspired by the progressive rock he loved as a young adolescent – his gateway to the fusion that eventually led to his discovery of jazz. While fairly abstract musically, it is a heavily conceptual piece thematically, detailing mankind's fall from grace, and the journey to return to Heaven.

Led Zeppelin's *Stairway to Heaven* is a fairly difficult song to interpret and plenty of divergent opinions exist as to its meaning, but in general, it can be summarized as critic Jacob Uitti explains:

"The most crucial lyrics in the song are:

*Yes, there are two paths you can go by, but in the long run  
And there's still time to change the road you're on*

This idea of two paths is personified in the song by the woman, entitled, who thinks she can "buy" a stairway to heaven, who thinks all that glitters is "gold" and who believes, sings Plant, If the stores are all closed / With a word she can get what she came for.

However, there is another path. That is one of the singers, who sings about rings of smoke, trees and other natural wonders. This is the path worth taking, according to the singer. In fact, music may lead the way for all of us, even the misguided woman who wants to buy a stairway to heaven.

This is what the singer hopes will happen to all people, especially the woman—a brush with reason, or logic:

*And it's whispered that soon*

*If we all call the tune*

*Then the piper will lead us to reason*

*And a new day will dawn*

*For those who stand long*

*And the forests will echo with laughter*

Yes, says the singer, there is hope. You're being called:

*Your head is humming and it won't go*

*In case you don't know*

*The piper's calling you to join him*