

GAYLORD UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST
318 4th STREET, BOX 385, GAYLORD, MN, 55334
Seventh Sunday after Pentecost
July 19, 2020

MEDITATION

Ralph Waldo Emerson, 19th century

"People only see what they are prepared to see."

THE CALL

Psalm 139

O LORD, you have searched me and known me. You know when I sit down and when I rise up; you discern my thoughts from far away. You search out my path and my lying down, and are acquainted with all my ways. Even before a word is on my tongue, O LORD, you know it completely. You hem me in, behind and before, and lay your hand upon me. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is so high that I cannot attain it.

Where can I go from your spirit? Or where can I flee from your presence? If I ascend to heaven, you are there; if I make my bed in Sheol, you are there. If I take the wings of the morning and settle at the farthest limits of the sea, even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me fast. If I say, 'Surely the darkness shall cover me, and the light around me become night', even the darkness is not dark to you; the night is as bright as the day, for darkness is as light to you. Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my thoughts. See if there is any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.

PRELUDE

Stacy Pauly

WELCOME AND NEWS OF THE CHURCH

CALL TO WORSHIP

Leader: We come to celebrate God's blessings to us.

People: Surely God is in this place!

Leader: We come to open ourselves to God's guidance and love.

People: Surely God is in this place!

Leader: We come to see more clearly God's presence in our lives.

People: Surely God is in this place!

Leader: We come to see God in this community of seekers.

People: Surely God is in this place!

Leader: We come to pray, praise, and offer ourselves to God.

People: Surely God is in this place! Let us worship!

GATHERING HYMN

"Immortal, Invisible, God Only Wise"

NCH #1

**Immortal, invisible, God only wise, in light inaccessible hid from our eyes,
Most blessed most glorious the Ancient of Days almighty, victorious, your great name
we praise.**

**Unresting, unchanging, and silent as light, not wanting, not wasting, but ruling in might;
Your justice like mountains high soaring above, your clouds which are fountains of
goodness and love.**

**So perfect your glory, so brilliant your light, your angels adore you, all veiling their sight;
All praise we now render as your angels do: in awe at the splendor of light hiding you.**

INVOCATION

Holy One, you know us already. Help us to know you better.
Let us see you all around us. Fill our worship with your Spirit
so that we may learn to recognize your presence in all places. **Amen.**

CALL TO CONFESSION

Our failures, shortcomings, and sin are like strong weeds in our lives.
We confess them to God, so that we may clear away anything
that would choke out our nourishing connection with God. Let us pray.

PRAYER OF CONFESSION

Gracious God,
in the fields of our lives, we strive to be fruitful, but we fall short.
We get so comfortable that we sleep when we need to be vigilant about the errors
in our own lives and the injustices around us.
We are so casual about wrongdoing that it creeps into our lives and threatens to
overwhelm the good we do. We do not pay attention to the unjust systems which shape our
lives, that we must work to transform so that your Beloved Community may come to be.
Forgive us.
Keep us awake so that we can produce the lives you call us to live. **Amen.**

ASSURANCE

You are not God's tenants or employees; you are God's precious family.
In the words of the apostle Paul, "You did not receive a spirit of servitude to fall back into fear,
but you have received a spirit of adoption."
As God's children, in God's embrace, you are forgiven and free.

GLORIA

**Glory be to Creator, and to the Christ and to the Holy Ghost.
As it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be.
Eternal life, A-Amen. A-Amen.**

LECTIONARY TEXT

Genesis 28:10-19a

¹⁰ Jacob left Beer-sheba and went towards Haran. ¹¹He came to a certain place and stayed there for the night, because the sun had set. Taking one of the stones of the place, he put it under his head and lay down in that place. ¹²And he dreamed that there was a ladder set up on the earth, the top of it reaching to heaven; and the angels of God were ascending and descending on it. ¹³And the LORD stood beside him and said, 'I am the LORD, the God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac; the land on which you lie I will give to you and to your offspring; ¹⁴and your offspring shall be like the dust of the earth, and you shall spread abroad to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south; and all the families of the earth shall be blessed in you and in your offspring. ¹⁵Know 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.' ¹⁶Then Jacob woke from his sleep and said, 'Surely the LORD is in this place—and I did not know it!' ¹⁷And he was afraid, and said, 'How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven.' ¹⁸ So Jacob rose early in the morning, and he took the stone that he had put under his head and set it up for a pillar and poured oil on the top of it. ¹⁹He called that place Bethel;

Romans 8:12-25

12 So then, brothers and sisters, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh—¹³for if you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. ¹⁴For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. ¹⁵For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption. When we cry, ‘Abba! Father!’ ¹⁶it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, ¹⁷and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ—if, in fact, we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him.

18 I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us. ¹⁹For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God; ²⁰for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope ²¹that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. ²²We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now; ²³and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies. ²⁴For in hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen? ²⁵But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.

Matthew 13: 24-30, 36-43

He put before them another parable: ‘The kingdom of heaven may be compared to someone who sowed good seed in his field; but while everybody was asleep, an enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and then went away. So when the plants came up and bore grain, then the weeds appeared as well. And the slaves of the householder came and said to him, “Master, did you not sow good seed in your field? Where, then, did these weeds come from?” He answered, “An enemy has done this.” The slaves said to him, “Then do you want us to go and gather them?” But he replied, “No; for in gathering the weeds you would uproot the wheat along with them. Let both of them grow together until the harvest; and at harvest time I will tell the reapers, collect the weeds first and bind them in bundles to be burned, but gather the wheat into my barn.” ’

Then he left the crowds and went into the house. And his disciples approached him, saying, ‘Explain to us the parable of the weeds of the field.’ He answered, ‘The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man; the field is the world, and the good seed are the children of the kingdom; the weeds are the children of the evil one, and the enemy who sowed them is the devil; the harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are angels. Just as the weeds are collected and burned up with fire, so will it be at the end of the age. The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will collect out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all evildoers, and they will throw them into the furnace of fire, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Let anyone with ears listen!

Sermon

“You Never Walk Alone”

Pastor Dennis

**We are climbing Jacob's ladder
We are climbing Jacob's ladder
We are climbing Jacob's ladder
Children of the Lord.**

**Rise, shine, give God the glory
Rise, shine, give God the glory
Rise, shine, give God the glory
Children of the Lord.**

**Every rung goes higher and higher
Every rung goes higher and higher
Every rung goes higher and higher
Children of the Lord.**

**Keep on climbing, we will make it
Keep on climbing, we will make it
Keep on climbing, we will make it
Children of the Lord.**

The familiar children's song of Sunday School days. The image of Jacob's dream of a ladder that goes from earth to heaven with angels ascending and descending.

Now maybe it was a strange dream because of the lack of blood to Jacob's mind—which happens when you lay your head on a rock to sleep! Or maybe it is the introduction to a message of God. Today in our first reading from the book of Genesis, we meet a man who is on a journey. His name is Jacob. You may remember how Jacob cheated his older brother Esau out of their father's blessing and inheritance. So, in fear, Jacob leaves his home in search of another. On the way, he stops at a random spot in the Canaanite desert. He pulls up a rock for a pillow and beds down for the night. As he drifts off to sleep, he has a dream: "a ladder set up on earth, the top of it reaching to the heaven; and the angels of God were ascending and descending on it."

In Jacob's dream, the angels don't speak to him. However, the writer of Genesis tells us that God "stood beside" Jacob and God reiterated the promise that God had made with Abraham and Isaac before him. God promises in this "pillow talk" with Jacob: "Know that I am with you- God says- and I will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land; for I will not leave you- I will be with you."

This is the fifth time God has made the promise to always be with the offspring of Abraham. It is a message that stands the test of time and yet seems to need repeating often. It comes this time to Jacob, in the same place that his grandfather, Abraham, built an altar to God after coming into the Promised Land. It comes to Jacob in a time in his life when he is feeling totally alone, bewildered, and afraid. He is caught between the dishonesty of his past and the unknown future. He is now in the disparaging place alone in the dark.

Perhaps you have been alone in the dark at one time or another. If you have ever camped in the woods by yourself, you can identify how dark it can get and how isolated and alone you can feel. You become hypersensitive to each noise in the woods and wonder why you made this decision and fear what is going to happen next.

I remember being at home one night all by myself when a great storm came. I was awakened by a tremendous bang. I went to turn on the lights and there was no power. Now, I thought, where did I put that flash light? The darkness of a stormy night was thick and heavy. I was afraid to take a step in search of the flashlight for fear of what I might step on or run into. In a moment of lightning, I caught the sight of a tree branch overhead. I knew that I was still in the house. The next flash revealed that the tree in the back yard had blown over and punched a hole in the roof. At this point I felt very much alone. I was in a bad situation, in the dark, and by myself. Unfortunately no sleep came and I did not have a dream of a ladder going to heaven! I did have visions of a demolished roof and a water drenched house.

The sense of being alone is terrifying. Fear and uncertainty begin to take over.

It is in a place of fear and doubt and uncertainty like this that God meets Jacob. God comes to Jacob and interacts with Jacob right in the moment of Jacob's fear, and isolation and aloneness. On his journey, Jacob felt alone. Aren't there lots of lonely places where we can find ourselves: the loneliness that comes from grief and change, loneliness of illness or disease, the loneliness that comes from isolation, uncertainty about the future, unemployment or broken relationships? At times, and maybe right now, these can be a part of our lives. And beloved people of God, it is right in the midst of our uncertainty, isolation, fear and doubt that God meets us

The Good News for today is the assurance that when we are in these lonely places, God is right there with us, standing beside us. As our Psalm for today says, "O God, where can I go from your spirit. Where can I flee from your presence? If I ascend to heaven, you are there. If I make my bed in Sheol, you are there. Even the darkness is not dark to you; the night is as bright as the day for darkness is as light to you. As Christians we believe that God is always with us. God is not confined to one place but goes wherever we go. God is always standing by us, and in times of difficulty and struggle that is when we need to realize that God is standing beside us reminding us once again of how much we are loved, not matter what we have done.

In Jacob's dream, he was given the assurance once again of God's presence with him. Note that God doesn't tell Jacob everything. God doesn't tell Jacob the details of his future, how he will marry TWO

wives, and how his 12 sons would quarrel, plunging the family into strife and grief and they'd all wind up in Egypt! No. Instead God tells Jacob what he needed to know at the moment, to get him through to the next stop on the journey. God was with Jacob. And whatever happened, God would be present and would not leave him. And this was a turning point for Jacob. The ah-ha moment that changed his understanding of his life. And it can be for us as well!

Lee, the one in our family who always has a story to share, remembers one summer as a boy spending some time with his grandparents on their farm. After a day of sweltering heat, a tornado brewed up. As the wind and devastation was hurling around outside, he huddled with his grandparents in one corner of their basement. After the wind subsided, Lee went outside and stood by his grandparents as they silently surveyed the damage. The big red barn was totally gone. The tall granary was moved off its foundation. Farm machinery was twisted and scattered here and there. As they stood there, it was his grandfather who broke the silence. He said, "This hurts...this hurts." And then he added, "But God is with us in this mess." Later that day, he noticed that as his grandmother was busy working in the kitchen, she was softly singing a song. The song was "You Never Walk Alone." She sang in her Norwegian accent:

When you walk through a storm, hold your head up high. And don't be afraid of the dark. At the end of the storm, there's a golden sky. And the sweet, silver song of a lark. Walk on through the wind, walk on through the rain. Though your dreams be tossed and blown. Walk on, walk on with hope in your heart. And you'll never walk alone."

Lee's grandmother went on as best she could in the work of her day, trusting God. Not hanging on to the storm and destruction. Not worrying about the next day and what would happen, but in the moment, being reassured that God was present. She was aware of hope. The world today seems like it is in the same broken situation. Life will be different with the Covid-19, and with striving for racial equality. And yet we can always sing because we know that God is in the present with us in the now. This means my friend; you never walk alone. We never need walk alone. It doesn't matter where you've been. It only matters that God is with you wherever you are. Everyplace can be holy because God promises to be there with us even when those places feel like a trackless spiritual desert.

God is with us! Whatever lonely place you may find yourself in at the present time: grief, anxiety, illness, broken relationships, frustration, overwhelmed... God has not forsaken you. We may not know the rest of the story. None of us knows what the next chapter holds, but we can trust God- the God who has been with us in the past and is with us in the present and will most certainly be with us in the future.

HYMN

"Not My Brother, nor My Sister"

NCH #519

Not my brother, nor my sister, but it's me, O God, standing in the need of prayer;

Not my brother, nor my sister, but it's me, O God, standing in the need of prayer;

Refrain: It's me, it's me, O God, standing in the need of prayer;

It's me, it's me, O God, standing in the need of prayer;

Not the stranger, nor my neighbor, but it's me O God, standing in the need of prayer;

Not the stranger, nor my neighbor, but it's me O God, standing in the need of prayer;

Refrain

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

Leader: Lord in your mercy

People: Hear our prayer.

Leader: As people of faith in you, O God, we kneel our hearts before you in prayer. Surround us with your Spirit as we lift our prayers and desires to you. Lord in your mercy...

People: Hear our prayer.

Leader: For those who suffer in body, mind, or spirit we pray for healing. Lord in your mercy...

People: Hear our prayer.

Leader: For those who are facing difficulties in employment, in relationships, making ends meet. Lord in your Mercy. . .

People: Hear our prayer.

Leader: For those who live in areas facing the drastic increase in Covid-19 cases and fear for their own health and wellbeing, we pray for trust that you will accompany them on whatever journey they encounter. Lord in your mercy. . .

People: Hear our prayer.

Leader: For those who live with the virus and its discomfort and the uncertainty of life it brings, we pray for relief and hope. Lord, in your mercy. . .

People: Hear our prayer.

Leader: For those who deal with fear and anxiety over choices they have made or have yet to make, we pray for grace, peace, and wisdom for their coming days. Lord, in your mercy. . .

People: Hear our prayer.

Leader: For those who are victims of racial oppression we pray for justice. Lord, in your mercy,

People: Hear our prayer.

Leader: For those struggling to learn and understand the ways one race oppresses another. We pray for insight, wisdom and the courage to bring about change. Lord, in your mercy.

People: Hear our prayer.

Leader: For our need to know that we are never alone, guide and direct us, O God, in the unity we find in joining our hearts and voices in prayer. . .

Our Father who is in heaven. Hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For yours is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever. Amen.

THREE- FOLD AMEN

AMEN. AMEN. A-A-A-AMEN.

CALL FOR THE OFFERING

What we have received comes from seed sown in us by Jesus Christ. Having received the blessings of the harvest begun in us, let us return to God fruits of the blessings we have received.

PRAYER OF DEDICATION

People: Loving God, we offer back to you what we have been given: our treasure, our time, and our lives. Bless our gifts and multiply them for your purposes. Amen.

Refrain "I am the light of the world! You people come and follow me!"
If you follow and love you'll learn the mystery of what you were meant to do and be.

When the song of the angels is stilled, when the star in the sky is gone,
When the sages and the shepherds have found their way home.
The work of Christmas is begun. *Refrain*

To find the lost and lonely one, to heal the broken soul with love,
To feed the hungry children with warmth and good food,
To feel the earth below, the sky above. *Refrain*

To free the prisoner from all chains, to make the powerful care,
To rebuild the nations with strength of good will,
To see all God's children everywhere! *Refrain*

BENEDICTION

Leader: God's spirit is always with you.
People: Wherever we go, God is there!
Leader: If you ascend to heaven,
People: God is there.
Leader: If you settle at the farthest limits of the sea,
People: God is there.
Leader: In all places, God holds you fast.
May you know deeply the presence of God:
Creator, Christ and Holy Spirit.
Go with God.

Postlude

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Remember in Prayer: Bill Cowell, Eunice Gasow, and Aggie Schue. We pray for others who have been ill or are home bound. We pray for health and healing for all people everywhere. We pray with anticipation for the day we can all gather again with our church family. Pray for the ministries of our church. Pray for those serving in the military and for our local and national leaders during these trying times.

If you have a prayer request or would like to receive a call from Pastor Dennis call his office at 237-2595 (leave a private voice mail) or his cell 763-258-3371.

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Pastor Dennis is usually in the office each Wednesday from 9:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. He can be reached at the office, 237-2595 (private voice mail) or his cell: 763-258-3371. E-mail: dmckee545@gmail.com Website at listen2god.org

Giving our Gifts to God:

**Tithes and Offerings can be sent to Gaylord United Church of Christ
P.O. Box 385 Gaylord, MN 55334 or
Dropped by the church office on Wednesday between 10 a.m. – 4 p.m.
Thank you for your continued support for the ministries of this church.**

- ❖ You can view our Church Service online by Friday or Saturday each week. Click on the link to view Service at: <https://listen2god.org/weekly-message/>
- ❖ Weekly devotional available each Tuesday at: www.listen2God.org/worship/devotionals
- ❖ UCC Church Directories are available for pickup inside the north door each Wednesday.
- ❖ Our From the Heart Offering for July is for Worldwide Mobility P.E.T Project. Your donation can be mailed in or dropped off at church on Wednesdays. *Thank you.*

