

CREATION WAITS
Genesis 28: 10-19a; Matthew 13: 24-30, 36-43
Sixteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time • July 19, 2020
by Pat Berger

Paul wrote in his letter to the Christians at Rome that, ". . . creation waits . . . for the revealing of the children of God; . . ." As I worked on this during this week, I thought about God's good creation waiting for the children of God to be: the children of God! Raspberry bushes seem to have it down pretty well, being what they were created to be. The dove that I hear in my neighborhood does a fine job, as nearly as I can tell, of being a dove. Rivers flow; mountains stand tall. And then there are the children of God. Some weeks it seems easier than others to identify our shortcomings; surely when we were told to "love one another," God did not have in mind that the police in Portland would respond to 30 shootings in the first 10 days of July; or that some of the beloved children would have more than enough and others not nearly enough, of anything; or that we would treat any part of the creation as if it were not as beloved as any other part.

None of this is new. The creation has been eager for the created children to act like God's children for a long time. We have looked at the example that is Abraham's family and what we might call their "dysfunctionality" in the past few weeks and today's reading gives us one more clue. We remember that Esau gave his birthright to Jacob for a bowl of soup; successive readings show us that Esau figured out that that had been a mistake, and there were resulting tensions around that. In today's verses, we heard that Jacob had left town for his own safety, and headed for the home of their mother's people. He picked a spot to lie down for the night, and he had a dream. The Hebrew text had the word behold in this reading four times (English translations omit the word) -- "behold, a ladder," "behold, angels of God," "behold, the LORD stood beside him," and "behold, know that I am with you."

These "beholds" would have assured Jacob that God was with him, and, wrote one commentator, were the ". . . surety upon which all of God's promises were built." God spoke again the promises he had made to Abraham and Isaac: Jacob was promised land -- even though right then he was a man without land, and he was promised descendants -- even though right then he had not married. Clearly, even though Jacob and Esau were having troubles figuring out who they were and whose they were, it was still God's plan for Jacob that he would be the one through whom all the families of the earth would be blessed. And, God promised again, "Know that I am with you and will keep you wherever you go . . ."

Jacob awoke, and it is a relief to hear that he realized God's presence with him. He took the stone he had used for a pillow and anointed it with oil and called the

space "Beth-El," which means house of God. He knew that God lived there. We know better than to think that this changed Jacob's whole life orientation, and at least for a few moments, the creation was able to see one of God's children being one of God's children. And that one of God's children was reassured of God's presence with him, regardless of choices he made.

God made many promises to, or covenants with, different people in the Old Testament. When God made a promise or a covenant, God was faithful to it. It didn't matter that the people didn't always behave; God kept the promise to Noah and has not flooded the earth again. It didn't matter that Moses was a murderer; God kept the promise to be with him. It didn't matter here that Jacob had taken his brother's birthright; God would keep the promises that were made while Jacob slept.

And we are reminded that the covenants that God made were unconditional. When we look again at verses 13, 14, and 15, we see that God told Jacob, "I am the LORD," made several promises to him -- and that is it. No conditions. Jacob, of course, being one of us human beings, did his part differently. He also made a promise, and began his vow with, "If . . ." IF! "If God will be with me, and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat and clothing to wear, . . . then the LORD shall be my God"! It always seems to me that this is a bit embarrassing . . .

Anyway: God had promised to Jacob land. Ultimately, what did that mean to Jacob and his children and their children and their children? The remainder of the Old Testament is a recording of events that tell us that sometimes things went well and sometimes things went less well. The land would be used to build temples and homes and communities. And then again, the land would be used to fight wars -- which were most often about who owned the land! As much as God had in mind that this gift of land would provide for growth for the Kingdom, those to whom God had given dominion would as often use it for ill as they did for good.

Judges as leaders weren't quite enough to straighten the people out, and then neither were kings, and then neither were prophets. Eventually, and we are grateful, God sent Jesus. Perhaps sending the Son would help the beloved children to act as if they were, indeed, the beloved children. The parable we read today, like the one we read last week, has to do with planting seeds. The people might not have liked being put on a par with seeds, and it was something with which they were well acquainted.

In this story, good seed was planted in the land -- wheat seed. While all were asleep, though, the enemy came and planted some weeds. (So that is how that happens! It has been a mystery to me where those weeds originate.) So: when both came up, the workers wanted to pull the weeds and the farmer held them

back. This weed was called "tares;" its roots would have surrounded the roots of the good plants, and they would have used the water and the nutrients in the soil, and it would have been impossible to get them out without ruining the good plants. Everything needed to be left alone until harvest time; then, it would be easier to separate wheat from weeds. Jesus' explanation helps us to see the planter of the good seed as God; the planter of the weeds is named as the evil one. The good seeds are the children of the Kingdom, we are told; the weeds are the children of the evil one. So: are we being told to sit back, and let happen what may? Likely not. The end of the story assures us that the works of the evil one will be punished in the end, and, we are told, the "righteous will shine like the sun in the Kingdom"!

It isn't ours to decide who is wheat and who is weeds -- and thanks be to God for that. That decision is God's. We can gain much more for the Kingdom if we make it our task to see where God "is in this place." We could do that this week as we go, wherever we go. At the Presbytery meeting (the Zoom Presbytery meeting, of course), we had the privilege of hearing stories and seeing pictures of how churches used the \$1000 checks that came to them from the Presbytery. Since I am writing this before the meeting, I can't give many specifics yet; however: if you read the article about Westminster-Portland in this month's Omnibus, you read that they announced to their congregation that they had received this check and would like for members to contribute to match it. And did they ever! Most of the contributions were \$20 or \$50, but one member offered to contribute \$5,000, if it would be matched. In the end, Westminster was able to contribute \$20,000, and joined with another congregation so that a NE Portland food bank could then hire a night manager! When I mentioned to a friend about the funds that GA approved for improving the church at Warm Springs and that we hoped that people in our Presbytery would be willing to contribute to that project, she said that people are in a giving mood right now, and she was sure it would happen. When the two checks from the Presbytery came to Plymouth recently, you all didn't have any trouble at all deciding who could use some extra funding, and happy faces abounded as Gina delivered the checks. These are difficult times, and money isn't the answer to all of the problems. AND, it is a treat to see that, no matter how many dollars we are able to give, they are very much appreciated. We can tell that we are being a part of the solution, that we are shining like the sun in the Kingdom! Many of us have spent considerable time pulling weeds in the past few months of staying home, and we have contributed to efforts to help those who are in need. Imagine God's delight when, instead of our paying attention to who might be wheat and who might be weeds, instead of that we say, "Surely God is in this place!" Creation isn't through waiting, and certainly it is seeing progress. Thanks be to God!

Let us pray.