

Genesis – Jacob is on the run. He is actually leaving the Promised Land. Jacob is going back to the very place that his grandparents Abraham and Sarah left in order to get to the Promised Land. What do you do when your life goes sideways? By this time Jacob has both the birthright and the blessing – and yet he is the one who is leaving home.

There is no doubt that at this time in Jacob's life he knew about the Abrahamic covenant. He obviously recognized the value of both the birthright and the blessing. Rebekah likely told her son Jacob that God spoke to her while she was pregnant. Rebekah had been told that was carrying two nations in her womb AND that the younger of the twins would be served by the older. All indications of this text let us know that Jacob was one who planned and plotted. Yet it is Jacob who is on the run.

Jacob arrives at a place between Beer-Sheba and Haran. He decides to rest for the night and takes a stone as his pillow to sleep. This incredible story continues to unfold as he dreams. He sees a ladder coming down from heaven with angels ascending and descending. We are also told of a message from God being given as this wandering son searched for rest that night.

Then Jacob has an “aha” moment as he realizes that even as things are – even as he is forced to leave all that he has known – God is still with him. Many people held the view that God was present in certain locations or geographical areas in this day. Jacob is astonished and names the place – Beth-el meaning “house of God.”

As I read and meditated upon today's lessons, I began to reflect on a point raised in comments by a theologian named Karoline Lewis. Reflecting on Jacob's story she asked the question:

Where is Beth-el for you? As Jacob discovered God in an unexpected place – have you encountered God lately?

Less than one year ago we had never heard of something called the Coronavirus. Less than one year ago a trip outside of the country would have been routine for many this time of year. I would have been planning with my sister Frances and dear friends for our annual trip to NY for a Broadway play. All has changed and in such a short period of time. Life has gone “sideways.”

Beloved, as the church is it critical and necessary for our existence that we know that **God is still with us**. Where is Beth-el for you? Karoline Lewis – *God in Jesus is a creation-altering event*. Hasn't creation as we have known it been altered?

In a moment of crisis my pillow can feel like a stone. I have fretted and worried over things that I cannot control. In this season of pandemic and outward social upheaval – I have prayed to for a right heart and right attitude. I have seen God “show up” as I reflected on my day and realized in hindsight that I was not alone. I believe that a heart without hope will miss moments when encounters with the Divine have occurred.

A quote attributed to St. Augustine of Hippo reads as follows: *Hope has two beautiful daughters. Their names are anger and courage; anger at the way things are, and courage to see that they do not remain the way they are.*

I want to share a brief story about my meeting with Congressman John Lewis. A dear friend of mine name June Weltner Lehman is the daughter of Charles Weltner the Congressman who held the same congressional seat that John Lewis held. June was able to arrange a time to meet and

invited a colleague and me to come along. Weltner was the 1991 winner of the Profile in Courage Award from the Kennedy Library Foundation.

We had about a 15-20 minute interval. Let's just say our time exceeded that, as we would later open the office door to find recognizable faces waiting to meet with Congressman Lewis.

When asked how he kept going on in the face of so much adversity, Congressman Lewis replied "... Quitting is not an option."

Little did I know that the turmoil within would find a life changing answer in the office of a Congressman of the US? I do not know about you but I typically do not think of Washington, DC as a place to go to encounter the Divine. But as we left the Cannon House Office Building to head back to Union Station – we realized that we had an unusual day.

You see I can use my pillow as a pillar to indicate a sacred place, a place of meeting – if I am hopeful. I can learn to embrace righteous anger and channel it for good if I stay away from judgment and bitterness. I can cultivate the courage to keep moving on even when at times it seems that I may be going the wrong way.

Jacob was going the wrong way or was he? On this journey he came to a spot and only later realized that God was there all along. So beloved I ask you, where is Beth-el for you?

Lean into your day-to-day experiences and reflect on those times – those ordinary yet incredible times when the LORD has been right there. You will likely be surprised that Beth-el need not only be at 520 N. Arthur Ashe Blvd.

Remember to embrace and be strengthened by those moments. Do not wait until you go to a certain place to meet God. Let

your pillow usher you into the awareness that the God who guides us waking and guards us sleeping is near. Embrace this awareness and your pillow can be made into a pillar as you mark another time when God was with you.