

**Holy Trinity Lutheran Church
Des Moines, WA
March 4, 2012**

Genesis 28:10-17

Sleeping Easy

- 1. The Sleeper's Situation**
- 2. The Sleepless "Solutions"**
- 3. The Stairway Solution**

**Hymns: 385 (vs. 1-2,5) – Lamb of God –
748 – 102 –120--126
Closing: 114 (vs. 1-2)**

All Scripture quotations from the NIV

Jacob left Beersheba and set out for Haran. When he reached a certain place, he stopped for the night because the sun had set. Taking one of the stones there, he put it under his head and lay down to sleep. He had a dream in which he saw a stairway resting on the earth, with its top reaching to heaven, and the angels of God were ascending and descending on it. There above it stood the LORD, and he said: "I am the LORD, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac. I will give you and your descendants the land on which you are lying. Your descendants will be like the dust of the earth, and you will spread out to the west and to the east, to the north and to the south. All peoples on earth will be blessed through you and your offspring. I am with you and will watch over you wherever you go, and I will bring you back to this land. I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you."

When Jacob awoke from his sleep, he thought, "Surely the LORD is in this place, and I was not aware of it." He was afraid and said, "How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God; this is the gate of heaven." (Genesis 28:10-17)

There is something about sleep, isn't there? It can be great or it can be miserable. It can be the key to a productive day or the start of a day of sluggishness. Some of you might hear sleep and think of rest, comfort and refreshment. Others of you might hear sleep and think of pain, restlessness and exhaustion. Sleep can be a peaceful eight hours, or it can be a fleeting few. The way that we sleep has a very direct impact on our lives, on our waking hours.

It is hard to imagine that the young man at the heart of our message this morning had high expectations as he lay his head down for a night of rest. So much in his life would've told us that a comfortable night of sleep was impossible. This young man was a fugitive on the run. He had stolen from his brother, his own flesh and blood. He had seized his brother's future, taking the double share of inheritance and blessing that belonged to the first born of the family. And as if stealing from his own brother wasn't bad enough, in order to accomplish this heist, he had deceived his elderly father as well.

In the wake of this deception, the young man was left with no option but to flee for safety. His escape had been frantic; he left alone, with nothing but the clothes on his back and a general idea of where he was headed. He was so frightened about the rage and retaliation of his older brother that he could not even wander into the towns that were found on his escape route. He wanted to leave no trail; he wanted no witnesses to point his brother in the right direction. And so, we find this young man in the middle of a desolate place, completely worn out, but sleeping with a rock under his head as a pillow.

The conditions alone would've promised sleeplessness, but there were also the thoughts and feelings that must've been spinning in Jacob's head to keep him up as well. Surely, there had to be serious doubts about the value of what he had stolen. An inheritance doesn't do you much good if your father despises you, your brother wants to kill you and you are miles away from your family and possessions. A blessing of greatness can't seem too certain when you are sleeping on a rock in the middle of a strange place. What lay ahead in the future?

In addition to the doubts, there had to be some sense of guilt as well, for what he did to his own bloodlines. If nothing else, what kind of situation had he left his beloved mother in? She was surely going to bear the brunt of his father and brother's anger over the trickery that had occurred. All those thoughts had to lead to a sense of despair as Jacob thought about his situation. Certainly, there were a thousand things to keep Jacob's mind spinning throughout the night ahead.

And as you think about Jacob and his problems, shift the focus to yourself. What are the things that keep you up at night? What are the problems that weigh on your mind? We all have concerns that occupy the quiet moments of our time. Maybe it is a concern about a family member's health. Perhaps it is serious questions or doubts about a relationship. Maybe it is unhappiness in your job or uncertainty about your financial future. The worries weigh on us throughout our lives. Turning our brains "off" is often an impossibility. The situations of life

often keep us thinking and thinking and thinking. A lack of answers can sometimes lead to a feeling of despair. There are a thousand different things to keep our minds spinning through our days and our nights.

And with all of those things on our minds, we are naturally always thinking to solutions. When you think back to Jacob, there really weren't many options for resolution, were there? Alone in a desolate place, 70 miles from home and going farther, the options were pretty limited. If there were going to be a solution, it was most likely going to be up to him and him alone. I doubt he could've felt more isolated. After all, he was away from his doting mother, the woman who loved him dearly and who had made all the plans previously. Jacob also had to feel like he was away from any divine help as well. Religion was very family-centric in those days. The head of the household served as the priest for the family. Jacob had left his father, and so he must have also felt like he had left the God of his father as well. If Jacob was going to improve his situation, it was all on him to make it happen.

And don't we often follow Jacob's lead when dealing with our own problems? When the people around disappoint, when we get burned time and time again, when struggles stare us straight in the face, it seems to all fall on us personally to find the solutions. A huge burden lands squarely on our shoulders as we try to figure it all out by ourselves. When trouble comes into our lives, the devil tempts us hard to think that we are alone. He uses those difficulties to have us doubt that God is close and intimately involved. He wants us to feel isolated, without any sense of help. Jacob's situation was not unique. We each face those same concerns and doubts on a daily basis.

And what happens when we think we are solely responsible for the answers. We worry. We lose sleep. We despair. The self-reliant solutions are often the sleepless solutions.

Yet, as we look at Jacob's hopeless situation, we see that for him, there was a real solution. He did not come up with it on his own; this help was provided to him by the One who never leaves his people alone. As Jacob lay on the dirt of the earth, with a rock under his head for a pillow, God gave Jacob a vision that must've led to the most comforting night of sleep ever.

In this dream, there was a stairway, going up from the spot on the earth where Jacob lay to the heights of heaven. Two places that were viewed as separate and distant were now connected in a wondrous way. On this stairway to heaven, the angels of God ascended and descended, going from the celestial heights down to the earth below. Here were the ministering spirits of God, the beings who served

the LORD and who did his bidding, and they were coming to Jacob's side. And there, at the top of the stairway was God himself, the one who controlled all things.

From the top of that stairway, God had a message for Jacob as he lay by himself on a rock surrounded by uncertainty. He said, ***"I am the LORD, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac. I will give you and your descendants the land on which you are lying. Your descendants will be like the dust of the earth, and you will spread out to the west and to the east, to the north and to the south. All peoples on earth will be blessed through you and your offspring. I am with you and will watch over you wherever you go, and I will bring you back to this land. I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you."***

There it was. Those words from God told Jacob that he wasn't alone. It wasn't on him to figure out his life. He hadn't left everything when he went fleeing from his father's tents. The God of his fathers, Abraham and Isaac, the God of the Great Promise of Salvation, here gave assurance that he was Jacob's God as well. The promise of blessings from his father, which Jacob had acquired dishonestly, which he was having doubts about, was now given to him personally by God Almighty. He would be the head of a great family. He would be a source of blessings for all the peoples of the earth. All that Jacob thought may have been miles behind him, were in fact with him, because God was with him. God gave him personal assurance. "I am with you and I will be with you. I, not you, will accomplish all of this. Look at this stairway, here is proof. I send my angels to you; they carry out my will; they guard you in all that you do. You are not alone, Jacob. You have more help than you could ever imagine. Just put all your trust in me."

And the stairway to heaven is not for Jacob alone. Look to Jesus' words in John 1:51. There, he gave Nathaniel a promise, there he gave us a promise. ***"You will see heaven open and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man."*** The promise that God gave to Jacob in a dream, he gives to us in reality.

Through his work on this earth, Jesus has opened heaven for us. Through his sacrificial death for our sins, he has broken down the great barrier that once divided us from God. Through Jesus, we have continuous access to our God. The angels who serve God in heaven also come to earth to minister to us. The picture of the stairway to heaven is that they go back and forth as easily as we go up and downstairs. Because of Jesus' work, the kingdom of heaven is not some far off place, it is something that we are already a part of. As the first and second floors are both part

of the same house, so we believers on earth are connected to the heavenly kingdom. That connection only happens through Jesus, the stairway to heaven.

And what a message that is for us in times when we think we are alone or when we think everything rests on our shoulders. In those times, you are not alone as you might think. We have the all the powers of heaven at our disposal, because of what Jesus has done for us.

Of course, it isn't always so easy to believe. God came with a promise of blessings and help to Jacob when it was surely hardest to believe. He didn't give this promise to him as he sat comfortably in his father's tents with all the assurances of earthly life around him. He came when he was at his weakest, alone, afraid, with a rock as his only source of comfort. The struggles will continue to come, and it is in the face of the doubt and uncertainties, that God asks us to trust in him. In those times, know without a doubt what is around you. Because of Jesus, heaven is open and the angels of God are around you, doing the Lord's work in your life. Amen.