

Letter from Rev Jacqueline

Dear friends,

As we prepare to begin our Lenten journey, I always acknowledge that unlike the first disciples, we are blessed with the insight into what lies on the other side – the spiritual promise of Easter-new life that shows itself on the ground with leaves and blossoms on trees, flowering bulbs and the nesting of the birds – new life and new hope...

I am writing this early morning and I have been inspired by a still-of-the-night time I spent in my garden during the night before. The sky was clear and the moon was bright. I sat there, favourite blanket and cuppa to hand – and as I looked at the stars, I noticed the longer I looked, the more they appeared – my eyes were getting adjusted to the life of the night sky.

It reminded me of the story I was talking about just the day before – the story of Jacob when he also slept out under the stars. Jacob was journeying in the wilderness, having left home very hastily following his rather shifty act of conning his father Isaac into giving him a final blessing that would leave the family inheritance to him, a blessing that is traditionally for the privilege of the eldest son who, in this case, should have been his older brother Esau.

And so, here he is tired, afraid and alone under the stars – in-between two worlds, and it is in this state he finds a stone pillow, lays down his head and dreams of the two worlds of heaven and earth - God has come calling.... The past is gone – the future doesn't exist – the moment and place is right in the 'now' where God is moving....

'Remember I am with you' God says to Jacob – he is right beside him – and when Jacob wakes – everything is the same but everything is different...

Jacob marks the moment with an altar made from the stone of his pillow – this is the place where God showed up – in the middle of his distress, in the middle of nowhere in rugged countryside which became somewhere. There wasn't a church wall in site but it was the holiest place in the world – the place where Jacob was, the place where God's presence has always been but now becomes known.

Jacob's response to this encounter and revelation was to utter the words – 'Surely God was in this place and I never knew...'

If he never found that place again – something had changed – for the good – because Jacob realised that the temple and altar of God was the world – and the heartbeats of life were his people – and he loves them.....

Who says you have to be squeaky clean to go to God – no – it doesn't work like that – we are loved because we were created – in love for love – and it's hard to encounter and experience such love alone...

Jacob goes on to be the father of the 12 tribes of Israel – the father of Joseph of the coat of many colours fame – and the story that begins to point the way to the fulfilment of all that was promised by God in his story of salvation – made complete – through Grace in the power of the Holy Spirit in the name of Jesus...

And so as we begin our journey through Lent, we can be reminded here that the stories of the Old are revealed in the spirituality of the Christian faith. They are infused by grace of the Gospel as the ladder becomes the resurrection – the descending and ascending of God's gracious love that comes to us in a dream and becomes a reality in our lives as we say yes just as Jacob said 'yes' so that we might also echo his words of *'It's true – surely God is in this place and I didn't even know it...'*

Lent is the time when we can perhaps think about the back-stories we need to lay down and be sorry for – find our own stone pillow in the wilderness and experience our own 'Jacob's ladder' moment that can bring us the hope we seek to find in the Easter story journey of our own lives....

We can try to attune our hearts and minds – just as my eyes became attuned to the stars in the night sky – so that we can see the many ways in which God speaks to us in a world where the clamour and busyness of life can shut out God's voice of calm encouragement that can signpost us in a hopeful direction through the ups and downs of our earthly life

I pray that this time of Lent will lead you on into a Jacob's-ladder moment of revelation and revival and that the springtime and Easter promise of new hope and new beginnings will lead you onwards.

Blessings and love, Jacqueline