

“Helping Us From the Top of the Ladder”

LaPorte New Church Swedenborgian

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Prayer of Invocation

O Lord our Redeemer, let this be a fruitful day! In this time of worship, open our eyes to beauty, tune our ears to harmony. The fragrance of your Love permeating every moment. The touch of your hand guiding all we do. Together, we want to taste with delight the joy of your presence here today. Amen.

Scriptures

Genesis 28:10-17

John 16:33

Hymns/Songs

“Morning Has Broken”

“This Is My Father’s World”

Genesis 28:10-17

Jacob’s Dream at Bethel

¹⁰ Jacob left Beersheba and set out for Harran. ¹¹ 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. ¹² 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. ¹³ There above it^[a] 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. ¹⁴ 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. ¹⁵ 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.”

¹⁶ When Jacob awoke from his sleep, he thought, “Surely the LORD is in this place, and I was not aware of it.” ¹⁷ 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.”

John 16:28-33

[Jesus said to His disciples,] “²⁸ I came from the Father and have come into the world, and now I am leaving the world and going to the Father.”

²⁹ His disciples said, “Ah, now you are speaking plainly and not using figurative speech! ³⁰ Now we know that you know all things and do not need anyone to question you; this is why we believe that you came from God.” ³¹ Jesus answered them, “Do you now believe? ³² Behold, the hour is coming, indeed it has come, when you will be scattered, each to his own home, and will leave me alone. Yet I am not alone, for the Father is with me. ³³ I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.”

**MAY THE GOOD LORD BLESS THE HEARING,
THE UNDERSTANDING AND THE LIVING OF HIS HOLY WORD. AMEN**

Insight for Worship

True Christianity 24 by Emanuel Swedenborg

“Each of us needs to make a pathway for God, meaning we need to prepare ourselves to receive God, and this preparation requires certain concepts. I say that we go higher, but I really mean that we are taken up by God. We have free will; we can use it to gain religious knowledge. When we exercise our intellect and gain religious knowledge from the Word, we smooth a pathway that God can use to come down and lift us up. The concepts that can lift our intellect higher, and let God take us by the hand and lead us, can be compared to the steps on the ladder that Jacob saw. It was set up on the ground but the top of it stretched into heaven. Angels were climbing up on it and Jehovah was standing above it (Genesis 28:12–13).”



“The Creation of Adam” by Michelangelo
(Fresco oil painting of the Sistine Chapel, painted c. 1508-1512)

SERMON: “Helping Us From the Top of the Ladder”

Here we are now together at the end of August, gathered outdoors in the glory of God’s Creation at Creek Ridge County Park. This annual church service and picnic we have toward the end of each summer means a lot to me: 1) It feels wonderful to me to gather with all of you outside, in nature just as the ancient peoples of Earth did many thousands of years ago. 2) As your minister, this annual service signals to me in a holistic way that soon after Labor Day, a new year of ministry and church life will begin, full of immense promise and growth potential. And 3) Given that a new year of ministry is upon us, I am reminded that I can consciously look again at my own part of the ***spiritual partnership that I am so very, very blessed to have with the Lord***, on our way forward as angels-in-training.

Our New Christian Church theology offers us a lot of wisdom and insight for what I am discussing with you this morning. The story surrounding Jacob and his family in the Old Testament times took place historically approximately 4,000 yrs. ago. Jacob’s grandfather was Abraham and his father was Isaac. In the literal sense of this story, both Jacob and his mother Rebekah are religious offenders, because they conspired together so that Jacob would steal his several-minutes-older brother Esau’s birthright, which was a big deal. In Old Testament times the birthright blessing given to the eldest son typically gave that young man these privileges:

- Leadership in worship
- Headship of the family
- Double portion of the inheritance
- Ownership of the covenant blessing that the Lord God promised to Abraham (descendants will number more than the stars in the sky and all nations on Earth would be blessed through the person who received the Abrahamic blessing passed down)

At this point in the literal story, Jacob is now on the run, fleeing far away from his older fraternal twin brother, Esau, and now Esau has murder on his mind. Here we see that not all of the key players within the generational saga of the Bible narrative were honorable. Like King David who committed adultery with Bathsheeba, some of these people were downright dishonorable, like young Jacob here. This tells us that God has ways of working with us and communicating with us while our hearts are bent on selfish ends.

But, there is another reason why Jacob's dishonorable character was as it's recorded here in *Genesis 28*—which is because he symbolizes our young spiritual-natural character that often has good intentions to want to follow God's laws and values, but which struggles often with making excuses for breaking the Lord's Commandments, wanting to get our own way, rather than follow the Lord's way, by living up to the Divine truths found in God's Word. Jacob also reminds us that we may often feel like we're struggling within the trenches of life on Earth, where now and then we need to be **"wise as serpents and harmless as doves."** (*Matthew 10:16*)

Jacob's story is powerful and gripping for all of these reasons, and it holds my deep attention also because it reminds me that even when circumstances in our lives are messy, chaotic and fraught with stress and difficulties, still we can be assured that the Lord is more than capable of reaching us and working with us when we need His encouragement and help from Him through our guiding angels, our friends who always see the good within us as we repent and reform our lives, allowing God to regenerate us gradually each day. Our reading in *True Christianity 24* teaches us this succinctly: **"Each of us needs to make a pathway for God, meaning we need to prepare ourselves to receive God, and this preparation requires certain concepts."** In short, there is an ever-present spiritual ladder or staircase between each one of us and the Lord in Heaven. And this staircase vividly reminds us that we are never alone, even though life often feels like we are. Like Jacob, we can perceive our lives in the moment as ordinary and meaningless—while the reverse is really the truth. In the ordinariness of life, God is here everywhere, ready for us to worship Him through a life of love and kindness. **This story illustrates for us that our role in our partnership with the Lord is to not only pray and worship Him regularly, but we also need to continually keep on learning God's truths in Scripture, as well as by way of learning and reflecting upon the teachings we find in our theology—those helpful concepts that empower us to extend our hand upwards toward the Lord—while the Lord then grasps our hand and pulls us upward to Him. As the Lord pulls or lifts us upward toward Him and Heaven, we are given a much higher, spiritual perspective over the large landscape of our lives.**

Through the many truths we find in God's Word, we essentially can walk upwards upon the mountain of spirituality and growth, which God waits for us to do...freely by choice. And when we do this, the Lord is then able to lift up our minds and bless us with a clearer and higher vision of the purpose of our lives, helping us see good ways of being useful, making this world and Heaven a better place. **Our part is to look to God with an open mind, and with an affirmative attitude towards the teachings of**

the Lord's Word. Our theology also teaches us, that while it feels like we have our choosing and God has His, deep down below the surface of our awareness, in reality it is always from God's Divine power that our partnership unfolds. We have our free-will and reasoning, but always the power for us to use our minds and bodies deep-down belongs to God. In my own life journey a vivid example of what this story represents, when I was in my mid-20's life had some severe twists and turns in it, which eventually led me into a severe depression that lasted 9 months. During it I was drastically out-of-sorts and I needed a lot of help from God. I sent up some half-hearted prayers for the Lord to whisk me magically out of my depression, but that did not happen. Instead, while the Lord stayed close by my side, I had to freely choose to read His Holy Word and seek out more insights, while also praying earnestly from the heart. And while I felt angry and depressed, I also had to stay focused on my daily work and routines, serving God practically both as a student and as an office worker, while also doing weekly therapy with my therapist back then.

Spiritually speaking, what I was doing was: “When we exercise our intellect and gain religious knowledge from the Word, we smooth a pathway that God can use to come down and lift us up. The concepts that can lift our intellect higher, and let God take us by the hand and lead us.” (TCR 24)

In summary then, my friends, it is often the knowledge we obtain from God's Word, which allows us to freely communicate with the Lord and Heaven through every step of our lives. Christ echoed this when He said: “Ask, and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened.” (Mtt. 7:7-8) Godspeed to us all this year, as we embark together in friendship and with faithful compassion through being useful every day. As God stands at the top of the ladders in our minds, holding out His hand toward us, we are free to reach upwards towards Him through the wisdom of His Word, giving us a much higher perspective in life, like the angelic people have right now in Heaven within us. Amen.