

Jacob. The name means supplanter: one who takes the place of, most often in a negative way. Like being a deceiver. And did Jacob, son of Isaac and Rebecca, brother of Esau, ever live up to his name! Deceiver.

Today we hear how Jacob was fleeing for his life, running away from his brother's anger which he really deserved. Jacob had stolen Esau's family heritage and blessing by deceiving their blind father Isaac. And what does God do about it? God comes to Jacob in a dream and promises both God's presence and a future with hope.

I find this fascinating. God seems to hang out with sinners: Jacob with all of his failings; Isaac, his father, who didn't really listen to God and screwed up both his female slave and first son's life by banishing them out to the desert to die and then there's Abraham, Jacob's grandfather, who on 2 occasions denied that Sarah was his wife to protect himself and put her at risk. Bad choices, horrible ways to behave; yet God continues to pursue and be positively involved with this family.

At today's point in the story, Jacob is pretty much lost. Maybe he knows the town where he might end up, but everything else has been infected by his deceitful behavior toward his father and brother. Jacob doesn't even know if he'll ever be able to return home. And we, who sit back and look at this story from the comfort of our own present time, understand that Jacob probably deserves whatever bad he gets.

And into this story of selfishness and deceit walks the God of mercy and new beginnings. If ever there was anyone in need of a fresh start, surely that person was Jacob. God's long reach into Jacob's life gives us reason to hope for our own. There's no one alive who is so faithful, so perfect, that he or she isn't in need of God's loving pursuit in some way.

The task for each one of us is to figure out how it is we are being chased by God and why. What is it that God wants to say to us and what—for heaven's sake—is keeping us from stopping dead in our tracks knowing that we have a God that wants us so?

God won't let us alone.

And maybe that is what we fear.

Relating to this God can bring moments of intense discomfort when God is pressing in on us, seeking to get our attention. Maybe we would prefer to be left alone most of the time. Something tells me that if we stop and really listen, we will find ourselves in the uncomfortable and wonderful place of being addressed by the Creator of all that is.

God's pursuit of us is with tremendous purpose. It aims with persistent exactness into our hearts and souls, so that we can then persistently aim into the hearts and souls of others. If we stop and listen to God, and then continue with our lives as though God's presence and guidance were only for us, we withhold blessing and light from others.

We cannot encounter the living God and hold ourselves apart from this world. It is the people of faith who know God and who live out of God's presence, who are to serve as agents of healing to

the world that God so loves. God is always searching and seeking people of God's own heart who will not be afraid to embrace the life of faith that is offered, and who will then, in turn, offer that grace into the world.

It is an incredible responsibility to serve as an instrument of God in this world. Abraham learned this; Isaac knew it and Jacob will now walk this same journey. We're simply not put on this earth to satisfy ourselves. This isn't about us. It's about the God who loves this world and every created thing so completely that God is not content to just let things be.

It is this God who walks with us in the sunlight as well as in the dark. Whether we are living faithfully or have lost our way, God chases us and calls us by name and will not let go. St. Paul says today that we are linked to God in relationship, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ. So we're members of this divine family.

It seems to me that whenever we are unhappy with life or whenever we sense restlessness for something more or something other than what we now have; it probably has a lot to do with our relationship with God. That's a good time to turn and return to the call and promises of God.

And what is that call and what are those promises?

The very same one that Jacob heard from God when God says: "Know that I am with you and will keep you wherever you go. For I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you." (repeat)

And what is that God promises to do for us? There are so many great promises. Listen to some of them when God says:

All things are possible (Luke 18:27)

I will give you rest (Matthew 11:28-30)

I love you (John 2: 16 & John 13:34)

My Grace is sufficient (II Corinthians 12:9 & Psalm 91:15)

I will direct your steps (Proverbs 3: 5-6)

You can do all things (Phillipians 4:13)

It will be worth it (Romans 8:28)

I forgive you (I John 1:9 & Romans 8:1)

I will supply all your needs (Phillipians 4:19)

I have not given you a spirit of fear (II Timothy 1:7)

Cast all your cares on me (I Peter 5:7)

I give you wisdom (I Corinthians 1:30)

I will never leave you or forsake you

I give you eternal life.... the returning us home to where first we came, from God and to God, with life in the divine which lasts forever.

Promises even for sinners, with mercy and new beginnings right here. Right now. *Amen.*