

CHARLTON CHURCH WEEKLY SERMON

Sunday, January 24

“Revealing: Awareness”

Genesis 28: 10-21

How God is revealing a new chapter in your life in these first days of 2021? It has been 24 days since we started this new year. How do you feel so far? During these three first Sundays of 2021, we have talked and reflected on how God reveals a unique opportunity for all of us. Let me give you a short summary.

The first Sunday, we said that a writer begins to write a book, not knowing its end. Therefore, we are called to write these new pages of the book of our life, knowing that God is on our side. Our main word for this new book is Reveal. And we learn that the word Epiphany also means reveal. So, we were challenged to begin the liturgical season of Epiphany by writing these new pages of 2021, taking two main things into consideration:

- a) To reveal our intention of experiencing new things this year, and...
- b) To reveal our desire to remember the past, but be hopeful in a new present and future.

God invited us through the prophet Isaiah to forget our painful past and reveal our intention to experience new things. It is there when Jesus comes and says: "I am making everything new!" (Revelation 21:5)

The second Sunday, God announced through the prophet Ezekiel that God had promised to restore Israel physically and spiritually by remembering. To accomplish this, God would give them a new heart...God would remove their heart of stone and give them a heart of flesh. (36:26). We also need that restoration. We need to restore our broken relationships from the past and ask God to see our sinful hearts and transform them with his Spirit. In other words, we reveal our desire to remember the past, but be hopeful in a new present and future in Christ Jesus.

This past Sunday, God spoke to us through the book of Revelation through the church in Philadelphia, one of the seven churches. As we find places that are always open to satisfy our physical hunger and quench our thirst, God is still there to satisfy our spiritual life. Jesus, the door, is always open for us. It is not a matter of chronological time or calendar. It is an anytime proposition. There can be a new beginning in your life whenever you are ready.

AWARENESS: Did you read the title of our sermon today? It says, "Revealing: Awareness." Be aware of what? There is a song in the hymnal "The Faith We Sing" [#2049] called "Dios Esta Aquí." Or in English, "God is Here Today." And it says the following:

God is here today;
as certain as the air I breathe,
as certain as the morning sun that rises,
as certain when I sing, you'll hear my song.

This short and profound Mexican Christian song has so much to tell us today. How many times have you been walking surrounded by trees, and the wind's breeze touches your face, and you feel refreshed? I wonder how many of us have ever heard the voice of God through an experience like this. Think in that particular place, where you feel the presence of God.

Some of the Bible characters experience God's presence in different ways. For example, God spoke audibly to Adam, to Noah, to Abraham, to Moses, to Samuel, and to countless Old Testament prophets. In the New Testament, the resurrected Jesus spoke to Saul of Tarsus, later Paul, on his way to Damascus and the John on the Island of Patmos. But does God still speak to us? Do you feel God's presence?

In our Scripture reading today, we notice that God audibly speaks to Jacob. He was the son of Isaac and Rebecca and Esau's youngest brother. Jacob was the type of man that you would call a slippery man. He was a manipulator. Through his unfaithful tricky way, Jacob becomes the recipient of God's covenant blessing flowing through the hands of his father, Isaac. With the help of his mother, Rebecca, Jacob had made his father Isaac believe that he was his twin brother Esau. Isaac's favorite son, the hairy outdoorsman, by covering his arms with animal skins.

When his twin brother Esau discovered Jacob's deceptive trickery, he became furiously enraged and was determined to murder his brother Jacob. At the suggestion of his mother, Rebecca, Jacob leaves his parental home in Beersheba. Jacob travels to his mother's brother Laban in Haran, a town located somewhere in modern Iraq. It is on the way to Haran that the Lord uniquely meets Jacob, as we read earlier.

First, let us observe Jacob's Confusion. The text says in verse 16, "When Jacob awoke from his sleep, he thought, 'Surely the LORD is in this place, and I was not aware of it.'" Jacob experienced the Lord's incredible presence. Jacob was tired from his day's journey. So, Jacob decided to rest for the night in the open field, with his head resting on one of the fieldstones nearby. And then he had a dream, a strange dream. Before him, Jacob saw a staircase coming from heaven and reaching the place where he lay. And he saw angels going up and down the amazingly long staircase. At the top of the stairs was the Lord Himself. The Lord spoke to

Jacob and gave him a promise. "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."

From what the Bible tells us about Jacob up till now, we can conclude that Jacob was not what might be called a "very pious person." He may have prayed to the Lord occasionally when the situation called for it, but Jacob was not by all means "a man of prayer." And in that place, he hears the voice of God for the very first time in his life. He not only saw the angels of God. He saw and heard God Himself. "The Lord is in this place." Jacob experienced the very presence of God – and he surprisingly said, "and I was not aware of it."

We may wonder why Jacob was, at that time, still unaware of the Lord's presence. Perhaps he even saw himself as the old Jacob, the slippery one, aware of his old deceptive and conspiratorial ways. There was, we might say, still too much of the slippery one in him. And here he had met and heard the holy God of heaven and earth. Old manipulator Jacob and the covenant Lord don't mix very well. How can a holy God ever meet and become friends with a character like Slippery Jacob? Well, God was, is, and will be. That's the miracle of His grace! A Holy God who meets us, and a God who gives us a new opportunity of life. This was Jacob's experience. And this could be our experience, too.

Secondly, we observe Jacob's affirmation of faith. Verse 17 says, "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.'" When Jacob is confronted by the holiness of God, fear grips his heart. He suddenly recognizes and affirms that he has been in the very presence of God Almighty, the Creator of heaven and earth. So, this place becomes holy ground. Today, many people have lost a sense of the holiness of God. For many people today, even for many Christians, God has become a pal, a buddy, a good friend with whom they are on a first-name basis. A God that they can keep in their pocket and use God when is needed to satisfy their personal interests. Is this really God for you? When Jacob senses that he has met the holy God of heaven and earth, he exclaims, "This is none other than the house of God; this is the gate of heaven."

Finally, we notice in this passage Jacob's Confidence. Verses 18-19 say, "Early the next morning, Jacob took the stone he had placed under his head and set it up as a pillar and poured oil on top of it. He called that place Bethel, though the city used to be called Luz." Jacob erects a monument as a reminder of God's transforming presence in his life. That slippery man wants to make a new beginning, turn over a new page, and write a new chapter in his life. God reveals in his life, transforming it into a new one. After all, he had met the God

of the covenant, the God who had given him such undeserved promises. As a consequence of that transformation, Jacob endorses a name change. He won't be called Jacob any more; his new name will be Israel. And this is just the beginning of God's promise.

SO, WHERE DOES FAITH MEET LIFE?

Do you remember the song that I shared with you at the beginning of this sermon: "God is here today." Friends, God is here! God's presence is in this place this morning. Can you feel it? But you can feel God's presence not only in this place, but in your car, as you are riding home, in your home when you arrive, and everywhere you go, for God is with us, and in Him, we live and move. Are you aware of God's presence in your life when you are personally struggling? How do you notice God's presence?

We have been writers during these last four weeks. God has invited us to write a new chapter and reveal our desire to remember the past but be hopeful in a unique present and future. A new chapter in our lives means to "be aware." It means to be conscious that God is ever-present no matter what. It also means to be willing to seek Him and be aware that even in the most challenging times of the year, when we feel hopeless or running away from God, God is present. As the Psalmist says in Psalm 139:8-10: "If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there. If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast."

We are just on day 24 of 2021. Many of us don't see much difference between the last days of the previous year and our leaving this new one. If you were expecting a 180-degree change from one year to another, this is not what a new year is about. A calendar year helps us to be aware of the chronological time in which we are leaving in. But God doesn't work with our calendar; God's time – Kairos, is countless, and we can not measure it. Kairos – God's time-goes beyond our human understanding. However, we can see God acting on us. Friend, are you aware that God is with you? Are you aware that God is revealing new things for you this 2021? Let us recognize that God's presence is here but will continue with us as we let God encounter us, even in the struggles of our lives. Perhaps, in that particular place or event, you find that this place "is none other than the house of God; this is the gate of heaven." -Amen.