

Rev. Paul A. Hottinger

Messages from God Fourteenth Week in Ordinary Time Monday, July 6, 2015
8:15 AM **Gn 28:10-22;** **Mt 9:18-26** (There can be times when we have such a clear vision of something, we know that someone is speaking to us.)

The reading from the Book of Genesis continues the saga of Jacob, the grandson of Abraham. **God is very much present to the people, and ordinarily approaches in a very familiar way.** This we see is very much part of the tradition of Israel in the Book of Genesis and in the Book of Exodus, and then at a certain point it stops. It continues past the Exodus to some degree. But **at this point we have God appearing in dreams**, for example. **We have God appearing in the appearance of a man or men;** for example, Abraham entertains some men in the heat of the day, offers them some lunch. After they leave he recognizes that this was a visit from God, and the word they spoke was the word of God. Later on Gideon will see a man that will be called a *malak*, an angel, **a messenger, but the word he hears is the word of Yahweh. And these manifestations are the manifestations of Yahweh.** And Yahweh is of course what is manifested in Jesus, so much so that Justin Martyr says that these manifestations are the pre-incarnate Christ, **the pre-incarnate Christ, a projection, if you will, of the great compatibility between humanity and divinity.**

Now this is very important for us because it's part of our basic belief that God became human. On the other hand, we have to realize that this is often the source of great ridicule. It's called anthropomorphizing God, making God like us, as if it's our work, that we are cutting down God to size, making God like us. But that's not what this story is about. **It's not about making God like us. It's about how God fashioned us in his image** with this tremendous capacity for creativity, for freedom, for love, and that God not only simply makes us this way, but then **accompanies us on our journey to his heart.** It's a long journey, and it's a journey that requires us to have connections with others. It requires a

community to witness to all this, and it's slow in forming. God is always taking time to do things, but people take time too to respond, sometimes very slowly.

But there are these high points, and that's what this particular story is about: **Jacob's very clear dreaming when he senses the connection**, a stairway, a stairway to heaven, a stairway up. Now again, God isn't literally in the heavens, meaning the sky, no. God's dimensions are not physical. But **the heavens represent the dimensions of God because to ancient people the sky went over everything and therefore was without boundaries**. Therefore it was an adequate representation of the divine dwelling. **So a stairway to heaven or a stairway to the sky indicates a connection between the human level and the divine**. And this is essential to the Bible, that there is this essential connection. There is trafficking. We are not alone. We are being guided. **We are being accompanied all the time**. So we have this particular story, and then how this becomes a shrine. Bethel was one of the principal shrines in Israel. Prior to David taking Jerusalem there were three areas or three shrines, three locales where people gathered, where the tribes gathered, to remember the works of God. One was Bethel; the other two were Gilgal and Shechem. **So this is a sacred place, and this is part of the reason why, it's part of the memory in the people, that this is a place where Jacob saw something**.

Now we all have dreams. Many of them are rather just ordinary, using up energy from the day before or remembering something, and often they are even silly, or sometimes they are funny. Sometimes they are fearful, nightmares. Those are not necessarily from God at all. **But there can be times when we have such a clear vision of something, we know that someone is speaking to us**. It's very important that we pay attention.