

[Genesis 28:10-19a](#)

[Psalm 139: 1-11, 22-23](#)

[Matthew 13:24-30,36-43](#)

Almighty God, the fountain of all wisdom, you know our necessities before we ask and our ignorance in asking: Have compassion on our weakness, and mercifully give us those things which for our unworthiness we dare not, and for our blindness we cannot ask; through the worthiness of your Son Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. *Amen.*

*Storytelling Jesus,
Annoying your listeners and followers with parables
that irritate and questions
that interrogate the faithful.*

*Irritate us,
Displace us from the centre
when we tell stories that demand
others for our own comfort.*

*Because you told stories in the hope that action would follow.
Let Action Follow.
Now and now and Now and Now.¹*

Happy Summer Friends!

Here we are in the warmer temperatures, settling into the end of July and what I love about summer is that there is a time for story telling, story listening, the reminder that we are connected to a larger narrative.

If you have been paying attention in the past several weeks, you have noticed that we are hearing the story of old Abraham's call, Abraham's complicated family, the birth of Isaac, the childhood of Isaac, Isaac's finding a wife, and now Isaac and Rebekah's sons....twins who wrestled each other even in the womb. Jacob who wrestles his brother out of a birthright and then a blessing (later.) Who said family drama was something new?

Each of these stories remind us of God's call through the ordinary, the complicated, the dramatic, through all of our lives.

Each summer that I was in college, I served on a camp staff of an episcopal camp. While I did not grow up going to camp as a child, this camp was a second home to me during my college years. Each summer we spent the weeklong sessions sharing the Story of God's love within and outside the ordinary. We sat around the campfire and told the story, we gathered around the cafeteria tables to share meals, and we sang. We sang old songs our parents sang at camp, we sang songs I had never heard of before and ones that after we sang once, would never leave our head.

One favorite song that seemed to stick perniciously, is one that was written by Henry Pritchett (an episcopal priest who served in both the deep south and NYC.) and it was called “God is a Surprise”

Well, surprise, surprise,
God is a surprise, right before your eyes.
It’s baffling to the wise.
Surprise, surprise, God is a surprise.
Open up your eyes and see.²

And the verses of the song told the story of the people of the bible who were delightfully surprised by God. From Moses and the surprising burning bush to Peter called from fishing to Jesus, mortal man and yet divine son of God. Each person telling the surprising love and call of God in their lives. Each with their ordinary interrupted.

Today our readings remind us that God is indeed surprising in when and where God will meet you. Both readings have surprising things occur at night.

Night time when we read stories to our loved ones before bed.
Night time when we let go of control and rest.
Night time when we have to be vulnerable in order to receive the restoration we need.

IT is in the night that Jacob takes a rock and places it under his head to fall asleep. To let go of the dreams of a wife, the strife of a brother, the consequences of his actions, the beloved-ness of his mother and the guilt of betraying his brother and father.

Amazingly, despite all of those things, sleep comes to Jacob and there he dreams. He dreams of Angels, he dreams of God, he delights in visions of being connected with God.

And God, speaking to him says “I’ll stay with you, I’ll protect you, I’ll bring you back here. I will stick with you until all has been accomplished”- what an amazing dream, to hear God say to you- “You are not alone” “You are beloved” “You are a gift.”

Surprise! In the midst of all this chaos, the pressure, the betrayal- YOU are loved, you are not alone, you are still God’s child. It’s baffling to the wise, but open up your eyes and see.

Similarly, Jesus is telling his disciples a story about a nighttime planting. Surprising things grow in this garden.

Now, when we moved to Boston a year ago, we inherited a yard of amazing things. Green things everywhere. Overgrown, lush, blocking my path. In

the past year I wanted to cut it all down and reshape the chaos and instead, my husband said to me- let's just wait and see what comes back after the winter.

Irritating! I had time, I had desire, let's fix this.... But no, let's wait. And sure enough... overnight, it seems like, all the things that died and went away during the winter have popped up and then bloomed, weeds that looked like they were choking other plants flourish alongside of a tree that revealed itself as a lilac tree, tulips emerged and now are replaced by lilies. Shasta Daisies have come up where nothing once was.

Our parable today tells of a different overnight activity. Last week we heard about the Sower and the seed (sometimes how I feel our Boston garden was planted) and this week we hear about a diligent thoughtful farmer who planted in rows and then the enemy comes in and plants weeds, one translation says "Thistles." Surprise, two plants start growing in the farm land..... and what should one do?

Surprise! Wait and let them both grow.

The optimist in me says "OH, maybe it's a partnership? They both will flourish and help each other out!" the pessimist says "BUT they will choke each other and no one will flourish"--- and if we focus here we miss the surprise.

While the Sower last week was ridiculous in his scattering of seeds, today's emphasis remains on the planting and seeds that were planted.

Surprise! The action here is not to eliminate the enemy's work but to strive amidst those weedy thistles.

Surprise, our role is not to weed but to tend our garden, strive towards planting seeds, nurturing those seeds and growing towards God.

In the most ordinary of ways, in the most surprising places.

God took the most ordinary, even grumpy, people- who constantly lied, cheated and broke their promises and called THEM into being vessels of transformative love.

Jacob was a trickster, literally wrestling with an angel one night, he constantly saw the worldly things as most important and yet- God promises, surprisingly to us perhaps, to always be present and always protect Jacob.

God's love for God's people has been constant despite destroying our own best interests. In God's ultimate desire to restore our relationship, he takes on the form of a human and plants himself right in our midst. Rose among thorns, inviting each of us in to learn, to hear one more parable with a surprising ending, to grow in a new way, to lean more towards the

Son of God and experience a sacrificial love that leans more towards us that we can even imagine.

God is a constant surprise if we expect a limited understanding of God. If we only imagine a God who could stop loving us, a God who doesn't care for us, we will always be surprised.

The God of Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebekah, Jacob and Leah and Rachel (next week my friends!) continued to surprise them in the moments when they were most vulnerable, most doubtful, most empty.

The God of yesterday, today and tomorrow invites us in our own weakness, doubt, and uncertainty to be surprised by the deeper love of a God who "pitched his tent" among us and knows the pain of losing a friend, of betrayal, of unplanned shocks and says again and again to each of us "I'll stay with you, I'll protect you, I'll stick with you." And you will still flourish.

So my friends, know that you too can rest in that embrace and be surprised as God shows up again and again in our own lives. Just Open up your eyes and see...sometimes even by closing them and resting.

Amen.

¹ Prayer from <https://www.spiritualityofconflict.com/readings/263/eighth-sunday-after-pentecost>

² <http://frankdunnsblog.blogspot.com/2013/12/surprise.html>