

**“JACOB’S TRAVEL CHALLENGE”**

**A SERMON BASED ON THE OLD TESTAMENT  
BOOK OF GENESIS (GENESIS 28:10-19A) AND  
PRESENTED FOR ORLEAN UMC ON MAY 23, 2021-  
---PENTECOST SUNDAY AND THE THIRD  
SUNDAY OF MY FINAL SERMON SERIES  
FOCUSING ON THE THEMES OF LEGACY AND THE  
PROMISES OF GOD**

**IF YOU'VE BEEN CHECKING OUT SOCIAL MEDIA  
LATELY, YOU KNOW ABOUT THE PROLIFERATION  
OF QUIZZES AND QUESTIONNAIRES THAT ARE  
ALL DESIGNED TO TAP INTO THE HUMAN DESIRE  
TO PROVE THAT OUR LIVES ARE PRETTY GREAT  
IN COMPARISON TO OTHERS.**

**YOU CAN TAKE A QUIZ ON FACEBOOK, FOR  
EXAMPLE, THAT WILL TELL YOU----AND EVERY  
ONE ON YOUR "FRIENDS" LIST---- WHICH  
FAMOUS MOVIE CHARACTER YOU ARE MOST  
LIKE, OR WHAT YOUR "MENTAL AGE" IS. ----YOU  
POST THE RESULTS ON YOUR PROFILE AND,  
INVARIABLY, YOUR FRIENDS WILL ALMOST  
IMMEDIATELY TAKE THE SAME QUIZ TO MAKE  
SURE THAT THEY'RE NOT LEFT OUT IN THE  
COMPETITION TO SEE WHOSE PERSONALITY  
AND LIFE ARE THE COOLEST.**

**ONE OF THE BEST EXAMPLES OF THIS SELF-INDULGENT TREND IS THE "TRAVEL LIST CHALLENGE'S 100 PLACES TO VISIT BEFORE YOU DIE." -----THIS LITTLE EXERCISE IS DESIGNED FOR YOU TO ELECTRONICALLY CHECK OFF SOME OF THE PLACES IN THE WORLD YOU'VE VISITED THAT THE AUTHOR OF THE QUIZ THINKS EVERY PERSON SHOULD VISIT. THE LIST CONTAINS LOCATIONS FROM THE DOMESTICALLY ACHIEVABLE SUCH AS THE SMITHSONIAN, THE WASHINGTON MONUMENT, THE EMPIRE STATE BUILDING AND MOUNT RUSHMORE TO EXOTIC LOCALES LIKE THE TAJ MAHAL IN INDIA, MACHU PICHU AND THE GREAT WALL OF CHINA.**

**IT'S AN INTERESTING EXERCISE IN MANY WAYS,  
ALLOWING YOU TO CHECK OFF SOME GREAT  
MEMORIES OF PLACES YOU'VE BEEN.**

**BUT, LIKE MUCH OF EVERYTHING ELSE ON  
FACEBOOK, IT'S REALLY ALL ABOUT TRYING TO  
SHOW THAT YOUR LIFE IS ACTUALLY OKAY --  
MAYBE *BETTER* THAN OKAY -- IN COMPARISON  
TO THAT OF YOUR FRIENDS.**

**LET'S SAY YOU'VE BEEN TO 27 OF THOSE  
PLACES -- A PRETTY GOOD SCORE. YOU'VE  
GOTTEN AROUND A LITTLE BIT, MAYBE EVEN  
TRAVELED OVERSEAS A TIME OR TWO.**

**PROBLEM IS, ONE OF YOUR FACEBOOK "FRIENDS" WILL NO DOUBT CROW THAT THEY'VE BEEN TO A LOT MORE -- SAY 50 TO 60 PLACES -- DEMONSTRATING ONCE AGAIN THAT THEIR BANK ACCOUNT IS HEFTIER, THEIR TIME IS MORE DISCRETIONARY AND THEIR LIFE IN GENERAL IS INFINITELY MORE EXCITING THAN YOURS ----ESPECIALLY SINCE THE LAST TIME YOU VISITED THE SMITHSONIAN WAS IN THE EIGHTH GRADE!.**

**IN FACT, LOOKING AT A LIST OF THOSE 100 PLACES MIGHT ACTUALLY BE DEPRESSING.**

**MOST OF US WILL NEVER GET TO HALF OF THEM  
DUE TO CONSTRAINTS OF TIME, HEALTH, MONEY  
OR OBLIGATIONS. WE BEGIN TO REALIZE THAT  
THE WORLD IS A BIG PLACE AND ONLY A VERY  
FEW PEOPLE WILL EVER GET TO SEE MOST OF  
IT..... WE STARE AT THE SCREEN LONGINGLY,  
AND THEN DISTRACT OURSELVES BY LOOKING  
AT YET ANOTHER CAT VIDEO.**

**BUT REALLY, IS SEEING A HUNDRED PLACES  
BEFORE YOU DIE THAT IMPORTANT? NOT WHEN  
WE CONSIDER THAT NO ONE PARTICULAR  
LOCATION IN THE WORLD IS QUITE AS AMAZING  
AS THE GOD WHO MADE THAT LOCATION AND IS  
PRESENT EVERYWHERE IN IT!**

**JACOB CERTAINLY WASN'T CHECKING  
FACEBOOK WHEN HE WAS ON HIS WAY TO  
HARAN, GIVEN THAT IT WAS THE PLACE  
HE *NEEDED* TO GO TO GET AWAY FROM HIS  
FURIOUS OLDER TWIN BROTHER ESAU..... SO  
HE WAS ON THE RUN. HE SAW MORE TERRITORY  
THAN MARCO POLO. HE WAS MOVING FASTER  
THAN A COUPLE OF NUNS ON *THE AMAZING  
RACE*.**

**JACOB HAD CHEATED HIS BROTHER OUT OF  
THEIR FATHER'S BLESSING AND INHERITANCE,  
AND NOW JACOB WAS FLEEING TO HIS  
ANCESTRAL HOME TO HOLE UP AND, HE HOPED,  
TO FIND A WIFE.**

**HARAN WAS THE ONLY PLACE HE WAS  
INTERESTED IN CHECKING OFF HIS LIST BEFORE  
HE DIED!**

**ON THE WAY, JACOB STOPS IN A "CERTAIN  
PLACE" FOR THE NIGHT (V. 11). IT'S NO TAJ  
MAHAL, NO BEACHSIDE COTTAGE IN BORA  
BORA ----(BOTH IN THE TOP 100 BY THE WAY----  
IN FACT, IT'S GOT NO NAME AT ALL, JUST A  
RANDOM SPOT IN THE CANAANITE DESERT THAT  
WOULD MAKE NO ONE'S TOP 100 LIST..... JACOB  
PULLS UP A STONE FOR A LESS-THAN-RESORT-  
QUALITY PILLOW AND BEDS DOWN FOR THE  
NIGHT,**



**AND, AS HE DRIFTS OFF, HE HAS A DREAM: A "LADDER SET UP ON THE EARTH, THE TOP OF IT REACHING TO THE HEAVEN; AND THE ANGELS OF GOD WERE ASCENDING AND DESCENDING ON IT" (V. 12). SCHOLARS THINK THAT THE HEBREW WORD FOR "LADDER" HERE ACTUALLY CORRESPONDS TO SOMETHING MORE LIKE A ZIGGURAT, OR STEPPED PYRAMID OF THE TYPE YOU MIGHT FIND AT CHICHEN ITZA -----ALSO ON THE LIST----. IT WAS AN AMAZING SIGHT, GIVEN THAT IT WAS TAKING PLACE IN THE MIDDLE OF NOWHERE.**

**THE ANGELS DON'T SPEAK TO JACOB, BUT THE WRITER OF GENESIS TELLS US THAT GOD "STOOD BESIDE" JACOB AND PROVIDED A NARRATIVE TO THE SCENE. THAT NARRATIVE WAS A RESTATEMENT OF THE COVENANT PROMISE THAT GOD HAD GIVEN TO JACOB'S GRANDFATHER ABRAHAM. IT WAS A PROMISE OF NUMEROUS OFFSPRING AND A FAMILY THROUGH WHICH "ALL THE FAMILIES OF THE EARTH SHALL BE BLESSED" (V. 14). DESPITE HIS DEVIOUS DECEPTION IN SNAGGING HIS BROTHER'S BIRTHRIGHT, AND,**

**DESPITE BEING THE YOUNGER BROTHER, JACOB WAS GOING TO BE THE ONE THROUGH WHOM GOD'S REDEMPTIVE PLAN FOR THE CREATION WAS GOING TO CONTINUE.**

**BUT FAMILY AND INHERITANCE WAS IN THE FUTURE. IT'S WHAT GOD SAYS NEXT THAT JACOB REALLY TOOK TO HEART. "KNOW THAT I AM WITH YOU, AND WILL KEEP YOU WHEREVER YOU GO, AND WILL BRING YOU BACK TO THIS LAND; FOR I WILL NOT LEAVE YOU UNTIL I HAVE DONE WHAT I PROMISED YOU" (V. 15).**

**JACOB WASN'T GOING TO BE CHECKING OFF 100 WONDERS OF THE WORLD DURING HIS TRAVELS, BUT HE WOULD HAVE SOMETHING THAT EVERY PERSON, WHETHER THEY'RE WELL-TRAVELED OR A HOMEBODY, REALLY NEEDS -- HE WOULD HAVE THE VERY PRESENCE OF GOD. NO MATTER WHERE HE TRAVELED, NO MATTER WHAT DANGERS AWAITED HIM IN FRONT OF AND BEHIND HIM ON THE JOURNEY, GOD WAS GOING TO BE WITH HIM AND "KEEP HIM." WHEREVER JACOB WAS, EVEN IN A TRACKLESS, FACELESS AND NAMELESS PLACE WHERE A STONE MAKES FOR A PILLOW, GOD WAS GOING TO BE THERE.**

**WHEN JACOB AWOKE FROM HIS DREAM, THE ANGEL STAIRCASE WAS GONE AND ALL THAT WAS LEFT WAS THE ROCK HE LAID HIS HEAD ON. JACOB TOOK THAT AND Poured OIL ON IT AS A WAY OF MARKING IT AS SACRED. "SURELY, THE LORD IS IN THIS PLACE -- AND I DID NOT KNOW IT!" SAYS JACOB AS HE RUBS THE SLEEP OUT OF HIS EYES (V. 16). "HOW AWESOME IS THIS PLACE! THIS IS NONE OTHER THAN THE HOUSE OF GOD, AND THIS IS THE GATE OF HEAVEN" (V. 17). HE WAS "AFRAID" -- A NATURAL REACTION TO ENCOUNTERING THE HOLY –**

**BUT HE WAS ALSO OVERJOYED TO REALIZE  
THAT WHAT HAD ONCE BEEN A *NOWHERE*  
*PLACE WAS NOW A SOMEWHERE*  
*PLACE* BECAUSE GOD HAD BEEN THERE.**

**JACOB CAME TO UNDERSTAND AN IMPORTANT  
TRUTH THAT NO FACEBOOK QUESTIONNAIRE  
CAN EVER CAPTURE: IT DOESN'T MATTER  
WHERE YOU'VE BEEN -- *IT ONLY MATTERS THAT*  
*GOD IS WITH YOU WHEREVER YOU ARE.* IT  
DOESN'T MATTER IF IT'S PARIS OR PEORIA, THE  
LOUVRE OR LOUISVILLE, BORA BORA OR BUCK  
SNORT, TENNESSEE---CANCUN OR ORLEAN  
VIRGINIA ----**

**EVERY PLACE IS SACRED, EVERY PLACE IS HOLY, EVERY PLACE IS IMPORTANT, BECAUSE YOU ARE THERE AND GOD PROMISES TO BE THERE, TOO -- EVEN THOSE PLACES THAT FEEL LIKE A TRACKLESS SPIRITUAL DESERT. SOMETIMES IT'S THE APPARENTLY GOD-FORSAKEN PLACES THAT BECOME THE MOST HOLY BECAUSE GOD'S ALREADY THERE, EVEN IF WE DID NOT KNOW IT AT FIRST:**

**- NO ONE WOULD PUT A HOSPITAL ON HIS OR HER TOP 100 PLACES TO VISIT, BUT EVEN IN THE ISOLATION OF ILLNESS AND PAIN GOD IS THERE OFFERING HEALING AND HOPE.**

**- THERE ARE LOTS OF LONELY PLACES WE CAN  
FIND OURSELVES -- THE LONELINESS OF GRIEF,  
UNEMPLOYMENT OR A BROKEN RELATIONSHIP.  
LIKE JACOB, WE CAN BELIEVE WE'RE ALL  
ALONE WITH NO ONE TO HELP. BUT IT'S IN  
THOSE LONELY PLACES THAT GOD OFTEN  
ENCOUNTERS US, OFFERING A SENSE OF HIS  
PRESENCE IN THE WAY THAT WE NEED.**



**- WE MIGHT DREAM OF A VACATION, BUT LIFE OFTEN PUTS US IN PLACES WHERE WE EXPERIENCE YEARS OF HARD WORK WITH LITTLE IMMEDIATE GRATIFICATION. WORKING A JOB, RAISING RAMBUNCTIOUS CHILDREN, CARING FOR AGING PARENTS -- THESE ARE ALL PLACES THAT REQUIRE US TO DIG IN AND BED DOWN FOR THE LONG HAUL WITH WHAT SOMETIMES FEELS LIKE A ROCK FOR A PILLOW. AND YET, IN WORKING DILIGENTLY, ENGAGING THOSE SPECIAL MOMENTS WITH SMALL CHILDREN, OR SEEING THE SMILE ON THE FACE OF A PARENT WHO FORGETS US,**

**WE DISCOVER, TO OUR AMAZEMENT, THAT GOD IS THERE WITH US AND STRENGTHENS US TO GO THE DISTANCE.**

**- WE CERTAINLY WANT TO AVOID THE FUNERAL HOME, BUT IT'S ONE OF THE PLACES THAT MOST ALL OF US WILL VISIT WHEN A LOVED ONE DIES. IN FACT, IT'S THE ONE PLACE THAT ALMOST ALL OF US WILL VISIT WHEN WE DIE, TOO. EVEN THERE, HOWEVER, GOD IS PRESENT AND REMINDS US OF THE PROMISE OF RESURRECTION LIFE.**

**ANY OF THESE PLACES CAN BE A "HOUSE OF GOD" OR THE "GATE OF HEAVEN." HOLY GROUND IS WHEREVER GOD STANDS BESIDE US, REMINDING US THAT GOD WILL NEVER LEAVE US NO MATTER THE CIRCUMSTANCES. EVERY PLACE CAN BE AWESOME, IF WE'RE PAYING ATTENTION. SURE, IT'S FUN TO THINK ABOUT TRAVELING TO EXOTIC LOCALES AND SEEING THE WONDERS OF THE WORLD. IT'S SOMETHING WE ALL OUGHT TO DO IF WE GET THE CHANCE. JACOB REMINDS US, HOWEVER, THAT THERE ARE WAY MORE THAN A HUNDRED PLACES WE NEED TO SEE BEFORE WE DIE.**

**WHETHER IT'S THE ENDS OF THE EARTH OR THE  
END OF YOUR STREET, IT'S AN AWESOME PLACE  
BECAUSE GOD IS THERE!**

**PRAISE GOD AND MAY IT BE SO FOR YOU AND  
FOR ME.....AMEN**