

Jacob stopped in the middle of his journey from Beer-sheba to Haran to camp for the night. There he had an amazing dream of angels travelling up and down a stairway to heaven. God affirmed the promise handed down to him from Abraham and Isaac. Of course, Jacob is far from the point of having the family he is promised. His journey had just begun. However, in response to this amazing dream, he dedicated an altar there and declared it to be “God’s house” or “Beth-el”.

Jesus tells a parable about an evil sower of weeds. The particular weed – bearded darnel – mimics the appearance of wheat as it grows. It is particularly noxious and is poisonous in high concentrations. A farmer would not want darnel to end up in the harvest. The farmer in the parable keeps the servants from pulling the weeds because at this point in their growth, they can’t be distinguished from the good crop. Best to wait until it’s easier to tell them apart.

Paul tells the church in Rome to remember that the glory that awaits them as children of God will outweigh any and every kind of sorrow or hardship. They are adopted – chosen – to be heirs of God’s kingdom. That choice does not come without pain for children cannot be born (or born again) without labor. Have patience Paul says.

Have patience. Paul wants us to have patience with each other. God wants Jacob to be patient and wait for the promise. Jesus asks us to be patient in distinguishing those who sow the word of God into the world and those who would sabotage it.

But, God, it's so terribly hard to be patient these days.

We were in the middle of our school years, our plans for vacation, our family routines when this virus came along. It upset our lives and our understandings of how and why people feel the way they feel. COVID stopped us in our tracks. We seem to be running in place, not going anywhere. Stuck.

God, we have no idea where we are going. We do not see the road ahead of us. We cannot know for certain where it will end. The words of Thomas Merton ring true. We seem to be stuck in a malaise of anxiety. Everything is being questioned. Our beliefs about ourselves is being challenged. When we look for leadership, it is hard to find. We're stuck in the middle between what once was and what will be.

Who sowed this virus? What enemy are we up against?

What if the enemy is us?

Just a glance at social media and you can see clearly the clowns and jokers who lay blame, tell lies, avoid truths. Oh, what to do to avoid being stuck here, paralyzed, while the world spins out of control?

Be patient. Patience is action, not paralysis. Patience is steadfastness with an eye on the future. We can stand in the middle with each other because we know things will get sorted out. God did not create this virus to punish. God can use it and use us to make earth a little more kingdom-of-God like.

How much longer would we be complacent about living conditions or system failures beyond the safety of our suburban homes if this virus hadn't come along? How much longer would we take for granted a haircut, a trip to the grocery store, an afternoon with best friends, going to church?

We are stuck here with each other, thankfully, and can become more aware of what this viral interruption is trying to teach us. I believe there will be a time when the poisonous weeds that choke and threaten death will be separated from the wheat. I believe that time will be laborious and painful. But, in the end, we will see more heaven to our left and to our right than we see right now. As we recognize each beautiful child as an image of God, love of neighbor won't always seem an impossible task.

Many of you already started reading about racism, whiteness, and how we've gotten to the mess we're in. Others are actively searching for ways to ensure people have access to vote in November. Some make sure the hungry are fed, widows are cared for, and friends are visited. I've heard stories about how this time has brought their families closer together. We're rediscovering the value of eating together again.

We are in the middle of this journey. We've come so far. We have a long way to go. We can't give up. We can't let the wheat be destroyed by those who sow poison, for how then shall we find nourishment? We can't give up searching for the image of God in ourselves and in those around us, for we need one another to remind us of our mutual adoption by our Creator.

Don't forget the words of the prophet John Lewis (may he rest in peace):

“Do not get lost in a sea of despair. Do not become bitter or hostile. Be hopeful, be optimistic. Never, ever, be afraid to make some noise and get in good trouble, necessary trouble. We will find a way out of no way.”

Following the gospel will get us into good trouble sometimes. The labor is often long and tedious. Justice is worth it. Justice is always worth it.

We should also remember Jacob on his journey and take time to rest. Remember that wherever we rest, God is with us and we may awake on holy ground.

This liminal time will end. What matters most is what we make of it. I'm committed to practicing active patience. I hope you are as well.