



RE:MEMBER | RE:SET | RE:PLY

A SPIRITUAL ROADMAP TO RESILIENCE

GOING BEYOND THE SERMON

Dr. John Stephens, August 15 – October 24, 2021

Based around Barbara Brown Taylor's book, *An Altar in the World*, this sermon series will help attune us to the presence of God in everyday life. In our ordinary activities, can we trust that there is no way to see God apart from living real life in the real world? What is saving your life right now in the face of a pandemic, political division, cultural upheaval, and racial struggles? In a world where faith is often defined as a way of thinking, the Christian life calls us to daily living and daily practices that remind us that faith is a way of life.

August 15

"The Practice of Waking Up to God: Vision"

Genesis 28:10-17

August 22

"The Practice of Paying Attention: Reverence"

Exodus 3:1-5

August 29

"The Practice of Wearing Skin: Incarnation"

John 13:1-17

September 5

"The Practice of Walking on the Earth: Groundedness"

Matthew 9:35-38

BIBLE S.W.A.P.

S—Scripture: Genesis 28:10-17

Jacob left Beer-sheba and went toward Haran. ¹¹ He came to a certain place and stayed there for the night, because the sun had set. Taking one of the stones of the place, he put it under his head and lay down in that place. ¹² And he dreamed that there was a ladder set up on the earth, the top of it reaching to heaven; and the angels of God were ascending and descending on it. ¹³ And the LORD stood beside him and said, "I am the LORD, the God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac; the land on which you lie I will give to you and to your offspring; ¹⁴ and your offspring shall be like the dust of the earth, and you shall spread abroad to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south; and all the families of the earth shall be blessed in you and in your offspring. ¹⁵ 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 have promised you." ¹⁶ Then Jacob woke from his sleep and said, "Surely the LORD is in this place—and I did not know it!" ¹⁷ And he was afraid, and said, "How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven."

Notes:

W-What Does it Mean and What Can I Obey?

J. Ellsworth Kalas writes, "Almost any circumstance of life can be endured if only occasionally there is a Bethel. As it happens, our Bethels often come when the circumstances are most bleak. Jacob is a fugitive now, alone in a trackless wilderness, but God visits him in a dream and promises him blessings for himself and his offspring." (*The Grand Sweep*, p. 14) In this passage, Jacob has wrangled the blessing due to his twin, Esau, from their father Isaac, and fled Beer-sheba to "seek a wife" but he was really running away from his angry brother.

It is here that God appears to Jacob in a dream. "The significant points of this dream-vision are that (1) the God of his parents and grandparents is present to Jacob even in this deserted place, even when he is running for his life after having cheated his brother; (2) God gives the same promise to Jacob that God had given originally to Abraham; and (3) God promises Jacob 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 have promised."

"When Jacob awakes from his dream, he is filled with sheer awe. The only adequate response he can offer to his encounter with God is worship. And so he set up a pillar from the stone that he had laid his head on, and he anointed it with oil. (vs. 18-22) By anointing it with oil, he set it apart from the ordinary and made it holy. He named that site Bethel, meaning "House of God." (Journey Through the Bible, Volume 1, Genesis, p. 88)

A-Apply

We may be forced out of our familiar surroundings these days for reasons far different than what Jacob experienced, but just the same, the consequences of pandemic have been isolation and unknown territory. Particularly for folks who are accustomed to participating in corporate worship and small groups as their primary spiritual disciplines and connection to Christian community.

Barbara Brown Taylor wrote “An Altar in the World—A Geography of Faith” in 2009. Listen with 2020 hindsight. “I began to spend more time in churches than I did in the wide, wide world. The physical boundaries of those houses were clear. The communities in them were identified . . . Turning aside from everything else we could have been doing, we did things together in those sacred spaces that we did nowhere else in our lives: we named babies, we buried the dead, we sang psalms, we praised God for our lives . . . Still, some of us were not satisfied with our weekly or biweekly encounters with God. We wanted more than set worship services or church work could offer us . . . We wanted More . . . And yet the only way most of us knew to get that was to spend more time in church. So we volunteered more, dreamed up more programs, invited more people to more classes where we could read more books. The minute we walked back out to our cars, many of us could feel the same old gnawing inside. Once we left church, we were not sure what to do anymore.” (“An Altar in the World,” pp. 5-6)

Amen to all that until the pandemic. Now what Taylor writes about is our new reality. “What if God can drop a ladder absolutely anywhere, with no regard for the religious standards developed by those who have made it their business to know the way to God?” Jacob lived in the time before there was a temple in Jerusalem with prescribed ways of worshipping. “Without one designated place to make their offerings, people were free to see the whole world as an altar. The divine could erupt anywhere, and when it did they marked the spot in any way they could, although there was no sense hanging around for long, since God stayed on the move.” (p. 8)

What unexpected places have become “Bethels” for you during the pandemic? How have you marked them as special?

Jacob was not expecting God to appear to him in a dream or while he was running away from home. Do you tend to expect God’s presence in certain prescribed places? Would you ask God to “wake you up” to new ways of seeing and hearing from God this week? Make notes here that will help you be aware of God getting your attention.

P- Prayer

Thank you, God, for the example of Jacob, who you sought out in a dream when he was on the run from his family and perhaps from you. Thank you that Jacob saw what You wanted him to see and responded in worship. May I see You and respond in awe and wonder as well. In Jesus’ name I pray, Amen.

BIBLE S.W.A.P.**S—Scripture: Exodus 3:1-5**

Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law Jethro, the priest of Midian; he led his flock beyond the wilderness, and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. ²There the angel of the LORD appeared to him in a flame of fire out of a bush; he looked, and the bush was blazing, yet it was not consumed. ³Then Moses said, "I must turn aside and look at this great sight, and see why the bush is not burned up." ⁴When the LORD saw that he had turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, "Moses, Moses!" And he said, "Here I am." ⁵Then he said, "Come no closer! Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground."

Notes:

W-What Does it Mean and What Can I Obey?

Moses, now 80 years old, was going about his normal business of leading his father-in-law's flock beyond the wilderness to Horeb (Sinai), when he saw the bush and decided to stop and take a closer look. It's easy to focus on the burning bush when we try to picture this Bible story. Moses certainly did. So much so that the text says he "turned aside to look at this great sight." Moses' turning aside is the hinge that opens the door for God to speak to Moses.

"What made him Moses was his willingness to turn aside," writes Barbara Brown Taylor in *An Altar in the World*, p. 25. "Wherever else he was supposed to be going and whatever else he was supposed to be doing, he decided it could wait a minute. He parked the sheep and left the narrow path in order to take a closer look at a marvelous sight. When he did, the storyteller says, God noticed. God dismissed the angel and took over the bush. 'When the LORD saw that he had turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, 'Moses, Moses!' 'Here I am,' Moses said, and the rest is history.'"

Mount Horeb was already a holy place known by the Midianites as "the mountain of God" when God appeared in the burning bush. It was where Moses would later return with the delivered Israelites and receive the tablets of law. But at the moment of the encounter, the place was holy because God's presence was there. "In Exodus 29, God calls Moses to the mountaintop and makes one of the most remarkable promises in the Bible: 'I will consecrate the tabernacle of meeting and the altar . . . I will dwell among the children of Israel.' (vv. 44-45) By pitching His tent in our midst, God becomes present with us, identifies Himself with us; and the reality is that God is here. But there is a big condition: God demands something in return for His presence among us. If He is to identify with us, we are to identify with Him, so He commands us, "You shall be holy; for I am holy." (Leviticus 11:44) (The Communicators Commentary, Exodus, by Maxie Dunnam, pp. 62-63)

A- Apply

The practice of paying attention is known as reverence. In this passage we see the profound truth that God is both personal and holy. He calls Moses by his name and tells Moses his name: "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." Moses trusted God so much that he simply responded, "Here I am." And yet, Moses felt great reverence. He hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God.

In “An Altar in the World” Taylor recounts her experience of learning to handle, shoot, and clean a bolt-action Remington.22 gun. Her father taught her to care for it. “This ritual, among many others, introduced me to the practices that nourish reverence in a human life: paying attention, taking care, respecting things that can kill you, making the passage from fear to awe. Supreme Court justice Potter Stewart once said he could not define pornography, but he knew it when he saw it. Reverence is a little like that. It is difficult to define, but you know it when you feel it.” (p. 20-21)

Have you ever had a close encounter with something that could kill you? How were you able to move from fear to awe?

What in your life has cultivated a sense of reverence?

Taylor makes a simple suggestion: “The easiest practice of reverence I know is simply to sit down somewhere outside, preferably near a body of water, and pay attention for at least twenty minutes. Just take the three square feet of earth on which you are sitting, paying close attention to everything that lives within that small estate.” Will you try that this week?

P-Pray

Here I am, Lord. Help me to notice and revere the holy ground that is all around me. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

BIBLE S.W.A.P.

S—Scripture: John 13:1-17

Now before the festival of the Passover, Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart from this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end.² The devil had already put it into the heart of Judas son of Simon Iscariot to betray him. And during supper³ Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going to God,⁴ got up from the table,^[a] took off his outer robe, and tied a towel around himself.⁵ Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was tied around him.⁶ He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?"⁷ Jesus answered, "You do not know now what I am doing, but later you will understand."⁸ Peter said to him, "You will never wash my feet." Jesus answered, "Unless I wash you, you have no share with me."⁹ Simon Peter said to him, "Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!"¹⁰ Jesus said to him, "One who has bathed does not need to wash, except for the feet,^[b] but is entirely clean. And you are clean, though not all of you."¹¹ For he knew who was to betray him; for this reason he said, "Not all of you are clean."

¹² After he had washed their feet, had put on his robe, and had returned to the table, he said to them, "Do you know what I have done to you?"¹³ You call me Teacher and Lord—and you are right, for that is what I am.¹⁴ So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet.¹⁵ For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you.¹⁶ Very truly, I tell you, servants are not greater than their master, nor are messengers greater than the one who sent them.¹⁷ If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them.

Notes:

W-What Does it Mean and What Can I Obey?

In this familiar passage, Jesus **knows** many important aspects of the situation at hand and what is about to happen to him and to the disciples. Underline all the places you see the words know, knew, or knowing, looking for what you can learn about Jesus, God, the disciples, and yourself.

At this last supper with the disciples, Jesus knew that his time with them was short. Jesus knew who he was – the son of God. He knew that Judas would betray him, and that Peter did not know the true meaning of Jesus' love for him and the others. He also wants us to know that true love requires serving others – in their everyday earthly, physical needs. "Jesus was the only one in the room who knew who he was, and thus the only one who was free to serve," writes Craig Hill in "Servant of All." (p.29) "This story is followed in John 13:34-35 by the command to 'love one another, even as I have loved you . . . By this will all people know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.' The kind of love Jesus required was modeled in the foot washing and would soon be fully demonstrated in his sacrificial death, which the foot washing foreshadowed (John 13:7) . . . the command to love and the call to serve heedless of social cost are often mentioned in the New Testament as evidence of the church's faithfulness and conditions of its fruitfulness. This short story contains a wealth of instruction on Christian living."

A-Apply

In "An Altar in the World," Barbara Brown Taylor points out that Jesus gave the disciples things "they could get their

hands on, things that would require them to get close enough to touch one another.” (p. 44. Sharing a meal and helping a friend clean their body are intimate acts that draw us into one another’s lives. Jesus embodies holiness and calls us to that kind of tangible faith as well.)

The mission statement of Chapelwood is to “make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world by *embodying* God’s grace as we receive it to those who need it.” We have discerned our call as a local body of Christ in Houston to be one of embodying God’s grace – right here and right now with real people in our physical space and time. “Christianity is not a set of beliefs or doctrines one believes in order to be a Christian,” writes Duke ethicist Stanley Hauerwas, “but rather Christianity is to have one’s body shaped, one’s habits determined, in such a way that the worship of God is unavoidable.” (“An Altar in the World,” p. 45) Taylor adds, “The last thing any of us needs is more information about God. We need the practice of incarnation, by which God saves the lives of those whose intellectual assent has turned as dry as dust, who have run frighteningly low on the bread of life, who are dying to know more God in their bodies. Not more *about* God. *More God.*”

When has someone demonstrated God’s love for you?

In Jesus’s day, breaking bread and washing feet were mundane chores that had to be done. What is your least favorite mundane task? How might you re-invent it as a spiritual practice? How might you use your body to share God’s love and grace with another human being this week?

P-Pray

Jesus, you took the form of human flesh and dwelt among us – eating and drinking, touching and healing, washing feet and feeding the hungry. You gave up your body in the most agonizing way. For all humans and for me. Help me demonstrate your love for others. Thank you, Jesus. Amen.

BIBLE S.W.A.P.

S—Scripture: Matthew 9:35-38

Then Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and curing every disease and every sickness. ³⁶ When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. ³⁷ Then he said to his disciples, “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; ³⁸ therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.”

Notes:

W-What Does it Mean and What Can I Obey?

“Jesus walked a lot, and not only during the last week of his life,” writes Barbara Brown Taylor in *An Altar in the World* (p. 65). “The four gospels are peppered with accounts of him walking into the countryside, walking by the Sea of Galilee, walking in the Temple, and even walking on water . . . This gave him time to see things, like the milky eyes of the beggar sitting by the side of the road, or the round black eyes of sparrows sitting in their cages at the market. If he had been moving more quickly – even to reach more people – these things might have become a blur to him. Because he was moving slowly, they came into focus for him, just as he came into focus for them.” Today’s passage puts Taylor’s ideas this way: “When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them.”

Do you notice that the disciples are following Jesus as he walks from town to town? They are by his side when he teaches, preaches, and heals. They are learning from him **how** to help people – teach the Word, proclaim the good news of the kingdom, heal disease -- and **why** – out of compassion for their need. He compares his mission to a harvest ready to be reaped. As they followed him, Jesus prepared them, equipped them, gave them authority, and sent them out to do the same things that he is doing. (Read further in Matthew 10:1-11:1 and also Luke 9:1-11.)

We can follow Jesus as the disciples did and obey his command to proclaim the good news and heal diseases. The harvest of people who need a shepherd is still plentiful and the laborers are few.

A-Apply

Taylor proposes the spiritual practice of going barefoot. “You do not have to be religious to do it, but if you are, then here is the scriptural warrant for it: “Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground.” (Exodus 3:5) She suggests walking barefoot to “wake you up to your own place in the world . . . it can lead you to love God with your whole self, and your neighbor as yourself, without leaving your backyard. Just do it, and the doing will teach you what you need to live. Or keep your shoes on if you wish. As long as you are on the earth and you know it, you are where you are supposed to be. You have everything you need to ground yourself in God.” (2 Peter 1:3)

I’ve been to the Holy Land and our first night was spent in Tel Aviv, on the Mediterranean shore. Wanting to be where Jesus had been and taking the advice of a friend who suggested this as an antidote for jetlag, I walked to the beach across the street from our hotel and took off my shoes. I pressed my feet firmly into the ground and felt the grass and sand and rocks beneath me. I listened to the waves hitting massive rocks that lined the shoreline. I rejoiced in being

there. Later we walked on two different paths in Jerusalem that experts believe Jesus had also walked upon. Wow. That felt like holy ground. Upon returning home, I grounded my bare feet again – this time in my Houston backyard. Yes, to combat jetlag, but also to let the journey with Jesus and my fellow pilgrims sink deep into my body’s cells and keep me moving with Jesus at home.

How will you practice groundedness this week?

P- Prayer

Lord, you remind us in your word that your divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness. May we be grounded in your goodness and your glory as we stand in your presence. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

Share Going Beyond the Sermon with Others

Have you considered sharing your personal Bible study experiences with others? Going Beyond the Sermon notes and the Bible S.W.A.P. study method works well with a small group. Just send the notes to a few friends and arrange a time to get together in person or online to share your insights.

If you need suggestions for starting a group, contact Teresa Rossy, trossy@chapelwood.org or (713) 354-4407.

We have other tools and resources on our web site at www.chapelwood.org/mynextstep.

JOIN US ON SUNDAY MORNINGS FOR WORSHIP, FELLOWSHIP AND STUDY

Adult Sunday Morning Classes

9:45 a.m.

A Place for YOU Singles, 60s +, LC201

Candlelighters, 80s+, Fireside Room

Discovery, 40s-60s, W203

Encouragers, 50s-70s, LC 214-215

Fellowship, 60s-80s, W101-102

Genesis, 50s+, East Rooms

Good News, 60s-70s, Conference Room

New The Crossing, All Ages, Fellowship Hall

New Modern Family, Parents of All Ages, Courtyard Room

New Adult Sunday Group, W201 (forming now)

Pathfinders, 60s-70s, W104

Singles Journey, 50s +, W202

Women's Perspective, Women of All Ages, W103

New Young Adults, 20s to early 30s, YB101

11:00 a.m.

Common Thread, 30s-50s, LC204 (meeting dates 8/15, 8/29, 9/26, 10/24 & 11/14)

Faith & Life, 50s +, LC211-212

Scan the QR code for more information on the web



Fall Weekday Studies

Monday

Monday Morning in the Word: Book of Romans with Rev. Tammy Heinrich
10:00 a.m.-11:30 a.m., LC211-212 and Zoom (begins Sept. 13)

Women's Lunch study: The Cry of the Soul with Women's Ministry Director Nicole Nehring
12:15p.m.-1:30 p.m., LC201 (begins Sept. 13)

Tuesday

Men's Spiritual Bootcamp with Rev. Josef Klam
6:00 a.m. —7:30 a.m., Fellowship Hall, breakfast \$10 (begins Sept. 7)

Men's Prayer Breakfast and Golf, with Dr. Wick Stuckey
7:00 a.m.-8:00 a.m., Fellowship Hall, 2nd/4th Tuesdays

Wednesday

Old Testament Bible study of books of Joshua—Daniel with Rev. Andy Noel and Al Hoppe
6:30 p.m.-8:00 p.m., East Rooms and Zoom (begins Sept. 8)

Women's Evening study: Cry of the Soul with Women's Ministry Director Nicole Nehring
6:30 p.m.-8:30 p.m., LC201 (begins Sept. 15)

Men's Wednesday Night study with Men's Ministry Director Chris Ferguson
7:30 p.m.- 8:10 p.m., Fireside Room and Zoom (begins Oct. 6)

Thursday

Men's Breakfast Study with Rev. Andy Noel
7:00 a.m.—8:15 a.m., Fellowship Hall and Zoom, ongoing

Joy of the Lord Women's Bible Study: Books of John with Amy Eggert and Small Group Leaders
9:30 a.m.—11:30 a.m., various rooms (begins Sept. 9)

Pastors Bible Study with Rev. Josef Klam
10:00 a.m.- 11:30 a.m., Fireside Room and Zoom (begins Sept. 9)

An Altar in the World Book Study with Rev. Rachel Sciretti
10:00 a.m.—11:00 a.m. **Zoom only** (begins Sept. 23)

Second Touch Spiritual Formation Group
10:30 a.m.-12:00 p.m., W201 and Zoom (begins Sept. 9)

Friday

Hitchhiker's Guide to the Bible with Dr. Matt Russell
12:00 p.m.-1:00 p.m., **Zoom only** (begins Sept. 3)

*Going Beyond the Sermon is written by Teresa Rossy, Director of Adult Discipleship Ministries,
Chapelwood United Methodist Church in Houston, Texas.*

Source material is quoted throughout. The sermons are streamed online and worship is in person at 8:45, 9:45, and 11:15 a.m. in the Sanctuary of our Greenbay campus.

Go to www.chapelwood.org for details.

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