

May 15-Written Service

Praise Team: Julie and Charlie Shanafelt, Collen Turner, Anita Tobin, and Brian Maag

Pianist: Laura Garred

Special Music: Natalie Lewis

Prelude

Welcome

Call to Worship

Leader: We gather in Your presence with praise for the faithful love You have shown toward Your people.

All: Your promises are eternal, and they are backed by the honor of Your name.

Leader: Thank you for Your faithful presence among us, even when we are not fully aware of it.

All: Continue to reveal Yourself to us.

Leader: Open our eyes to see You here among us; open our ears to hear Your Word.

All: For surely, You are with us in this place.

Song: Blessed Be Your Name

Blessed be Your name in the land that is plentiful;
Where the streams of abundance flow, blessed be Your name;
Blessed be Your name when I'm found in the desert place,
When I walk thro' the wilderness, blessed be Your name;

Every blessing You pour out I'll turn back to praise;
When the darkness closes in, Lord, still I will say.

Blessed be the name of the Lord, blessed be Your name;
Blessed be the name of the Lord, blessed be Your glorious name.

Blessed be Your name when the sun's shining down on me;
When the world's all as it should be, blessed be Your name;
Blessed be Your name on the road marked with suffering;
Tho' there's pain in the offering, blessed be Your name;

Every blessing You pour out I'll turn back to praise;
When the darkness closes in Lord, still I will say.
Blessed be the name of the Lord, blessed be Your name;
Blessed be the name of the Lord, blessed be Your glorious name.

Prayer- Dear Lord, we stand like Jacob at the gate of heaven believing that the door is still open. We come to offer sacrifices of praise and thanksgiving. We confess that sometimes we may feel unworthy to speak your name in prayer, but we are here today standing before you in faith. Reassure us today

that the same God who opened heaven to Jacob, leans in to hear our whispered prayers. Thank you God, for loving us in spite of who we have been and who we are, with your unrelenting love. In Your

Song: Mighty to Save

Everyone needs compassion, love that's never failing,
Let mercy fall on me.
Everyone needs forgiveness, the kindness of a Savior,
The Hope of nations.

Savior, He can move the mountains,
My God is mighty to save, He is mighty to save.
Forever, Author of Salvation,
He rose and conquered the grave, Jesus conquered the grave.

So take me as You find me, all my fears and failures,
Fill my life again.
I give my life to follow, everything I believe in, now I surrender.

Savior, He can move the mountains,
My God is mighty to save, He is mighty to save.
Forever, Author of Salvation,
He rose and conquered the grave, Jesus conquered the grave.

Profession of Faith- Natalie Lewis

Announcements

Special Music- Everything sung by Natalie Lewis

Congregational Prayer

Song: #553- Nearer My God, To Thee (vs. 1,3,5)

Nearer, My God, to Thee, nearer to Thee,
E'en though it be a cross that raiseth me!
Still all my song shall be: nearer, my God, to Thee;
Nearer, my God, to Thee, nearer to Thee.

There let the way appear, steps unto heaven.
All that Thou sendest me, in mercy given.
Angels to beckon me nearer, my God, to Thee:
Nearer, my God, to Thee, nearer to Thee.

Or if, on joyful wing cleaving the sky,

Sun, moon, and stars forgot, upward I fly,
Still all my song shall be: nearer, my God, to Thee;
Nearer, my God, to Thee, nearer to Thee.

Offering Song- #633- Open Our Eyes, Lord

Offering Prayer

Children's Message

Scripture: Genesis 28: 10-22

Jacob left Beersheba and set out for Haran. When he reached a certain place, he stopped for the night because the sun had set. Taking one of the stones there, he put it under his head and lay down to sleep. He had a dream in which he saw a stairway resting on the earth, with its top reaching to heaven, and the angels of God were ascending and descending on it. There above it stood the Lord, and He said: "I am the Lord, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac. I will give you and your descendants the land on which you are lying. Your descendants will be like the dust of the earth, and you will spread out to the west and to the east, to the north and to the south. All peoples on earth will be blessed through you and your offspring. I am with you and will watch over you wherever you go, and I will bring you back to this land. I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you."

When Jacob awoke from his sleep, he thought, "Surely the Lord is in this place, and I was not aware of it." He was afraid and said, "How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God; this is the gate of heaven."

Early the next morning Jacob took the stone he had placed under his head and set it up as a pillar and poured oil on top of it. He called that place Bethel, though the city used to be called Luz.

Then Jacob made a vow, saying, "If God will be with me and will watch over me on this journey I am taking and will give me food to eat and clothes to wear so that I return safely to my father's house, then the Lord will be my God and this stone that I have set up as a pillar will be God's house, and all that you give me I will give you a tenth."

Sermon

Intro-Iowa City

Congratulations again to our graduates!

We celebrate all your work and perseverance that has brought you to this point

These are milestones worth celebrating

It's also a day when we look ahead at what comes next

For some of us, for me, it brings back some of those same milestones in our own lives

I graduated from a small school, with 57 people in my class

For a whole list of reasons, I enrolled at Iowa for the fall. With a class of thousands.

Move-in day was on a Saturday, vans and trucks everywhere, people looking for parking, laughter and tears

But I'd already been there since Wednesday

Our family vacation was in Chicago (Wrigley Field) that year and I got dropped off and found my way into my room early to fit with the family schedule

New city, new home, no TV or computer (roommate was bringing those), no cafeteria, \$20 in cash until things opened up

So I wandered an empty campus for about 3 days, praying for people that would become friends, praying that this was the right decision for an introvert from a small town

It is still one of the loneliest memories I've got

And an incredibly important milestone in my life

Jacob knew what it was like to be lonely too

Scripture-Genesis 28:10-22

Jacob's background

Alienated from family and home

Tricked his dying, nearly blind father

Stole blessing from brother who's now ready to kill him

He's running away from home heading for a distant relative that he's probably never met

Who may not be alive and may not be where he's supposed to be found

He's not sure he can ever go home again

For sure, he doesn't expect to see his sick father once he's left

He's in the wilderness, by himself, with very little

When he's so exhausted he can't go any further that night, he uses a rock for a pillow

And falls asleep by himself

In my mind, I see him crying himself to sleep on that rock

That's where Jacob meets God

Jacob has a dream where he sees angels all over, coming and going between earth and heaven

He hears God speaking to him

Reminding him of the promises that have been made to his grandfather, Abraham, and his father, Isaac

Reminding him that he is still a part of that family and still part of their story

God tells Jacob that He is with him and will be watching over him

God promises that He will bring Jacob back to this place

God promises that Jacob will be part of a huge family, stretched across the whole world

When Jacob wakes up, we read this thoughts

“Surely the Lord is in this place, and I was not aware of it.”

“How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God; this is the gate of heaven.”

Jacob realizes that even though he wasn't aware

Even though he thought he was all alone

He was in the very house of God

Milestone-Bethel

All of this had an impact on Jacob

This was a milestone moment in his life

He took that stone he'd slept on the night before, stood it up to make a monument

And called it Bethel (House of God)

There at Bethel, Jacob makes a vow

If God really is with and will continue to be with me, then I will stay with him

If God will provide for me and watch over me like He has promised, I will promise to return those blessings to Him

This will be a relationship, the defining relationship of my life

And this Bethel Stone will be my reminder that I am never alone and never on my own

I think we all have times where we feel alone like Jacob

We can be surrounded by a crowd and feel like we have no one and nothing

We can isolate ourselves

Our actions, like Jacob, can break those relationships closest to us

Or we can move across the state where we don't really know anyone or have anything

What I found after my prayers was that God had already answered them even before I prayed the words

God was already in this place, yes even at Iowa

I had several neighbors and soon to be friends that were also Christians coming to campus looking for what God had in store for them

My pastor put me in touch with a church that would be my home away from home

Sarah was already enrolled and planning for her own move in on Saturday, we just didn't know each other yet

Jacob wasn't aware of anyone being there with him, including God

But just because he wasn't aware, didn't mean God wasn't already in that place

Ahead of him, preparing what was in store

The next time you feel alone, look back on your own Bethel milestones

Those places you've seen God, even when you might not have been aware of Him before

Graduates

God is going ahead of you already into all of these places where you'll live, work, and learn

Open your eyes and look for Him, especially on those early days when you might feel alone and wonder if you're in the right place

Song: #572- Blessed Assurance (vs. 1,3)

Blessed assurance, Jesus is mine! O what a foretaste of glory divine!
Heir of salvation, purchase of God, Born of His Spirit, washed in His blood.

This is my story, this is my song, praising my Savior all the day long;
This is my story, this is my song, praising my Savior all the day long.

Perfect submission-all is at rest, I in my Savior am happy and blest;
Watching and waiting, looking above, filled with His goodness, lost in His love.

This is my story, this is my song, praising my Savior all the day long;
This is my story, this is my song, praising my Savior all the day long.

Benediction

Postlude