

## **Sermon Draft**

**Text: Romans 5:1–11**

**Sermon: “Peace With God”**

There sleeps Jacob, a rock under his head. Given his biography, one wonders which of the two was harder—Jacob’s head or his pillow of stone. He’d had his way with his blind father whom he’d tricked into giving him the blessing that was rightfully his brother’s. Sneaky, yes, but there was a hitch, for in so doing Jacob had kindled the wrath of Esau, who was now hungry for a pound of his conniving brother’s flesh. So there goes the famous deceiver, Jacob, hightailing it out of his homeland to sneak off to the land of his mother’s relative to wait for the smoke to clear.

In Jacob, we are not exactly dealing with the icon of holiness. His very name means “supplanter” or “cheater” (Genesis 27:36). Now the cheat has dug his own grave through the shovel of deception, and his brother stands ready to bury him through his threats to kill him.

So there poor Jacob lies: his head on a rock, his heart sick for home, his bones bushed from a day of flight—a man without a home or hope or much of anything except a seemingly dark and dismal future.

This is not a situation where God would appear, we might think. But, lo and behold, there he is. As Jacob slept, there appeared to him in a dream the God of his father Isaac and grandfather Abraham. The Lord of hosts stood atop a stairway (or ladder) that stretched from earth to heaven. And the angels of God were ascending and descending this stairway from Jacob to God and back again.

From atop his ladder-pulpit, the Lord opened his mouth to address this homeless and hopeless man. The message God spoke could well be summarized in one brief statement: Jacob, you're my man and I'm your God.

These words of undeserved grace to an undeserving man in the depths of his fear and hopelessness are words from a loving God that raised Jacob to his feet and filled his empty heart with hope. The Lord had not abandoned him.

The God of grace is not an abandoning God, but a seeking Shepherd who never rests until he finds his lost sheep. And there in Bethel our Good Shepherd found that lost lamb, Jacob, whom he put on his shoulders to carry until he reached the green pastures of the heavenly fatherland.

There's a lot of Jacob in all of us. We've hurt our families by our little lies, our half-deceptions, our struggle to have things go our way. When it comes to self-interest, we all know the tricks of the trade, which result in broken homes, broken lives, and broken promises. We all sin each and every day in thought, word and deed. And let us not forget the sins of omission, opportunities rejected things that God would have us do for one another that we leave undone. After all it is a me and mine world. Selfishness!

What are we to do? Repent: tell the truth about ourselves no matter how much it hurts. Repent: open our mouths and confess to God what he already knows—that we have lived as if God does not matter.

Repent: turn from the sins that send us down the paths Jacob trod and turn to the One who trod for us the path that leads to the cross. Turn to our Lord Jesus Christ, and we will find in him alone peace with God.

It was to all of us Jacobs that the apostle Paul spoke the words from Romans 5 our text this morning. We have *“peace with God,”* which is more than a fluttering emotion within the heart, more than absence of conflict. This peace is rooted in the One who is our peace, Jesus Christ. We have peace in him, for in him the flames of divine wrath against us have been doused, the fires put out by the blood of his sacrifice. We have peace in Christ, for in his human nature and in his death on the cross our Savior took our nature upon himself. He took upon himself the penalty for our selfishness, our meanness, our anger, our grudges, our pettiness, our perversity.

All that we are, all that Jacob was, Christ took upon himself. Therefore, into his flesh were driven the nails of our judgment. Into his brow were beaten the thorns of our sins.

Into his feet were placed the spikes of divine vengeance. And, worst of all, in his heart and soul burned the flames of divine justice that should have burned in our own.

The man of peace became the sacrifice for sin, condemned by God, that in his death on our behalf, we might have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

The Son of God did for us not only what we're incapable of doing, but even what we had no desire to do in the first place. ***“For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly.”*** (Romans 5:6–11.) Behold the divine love of the Father: not for friends, not for family, not for equals, not for servants, but for convicted criminals, wicked enemies, haters of God. For all of us Jacobs—for the selfish, homeless, hopeless ones—Christ died.

If, while we were in such a pitiable state, Christ was willing to die for us and thus reconcile us to God, what blessedness must now be ours since we are God's children and heirs with Christ!

What divine acceptance we now have that our crucified Savior is also our living High Priest, who constantly intercedes for us at the Father's right hand! As Johann Gerhard writes in his *Sacred Meditations*: **He loved us while we were yet enemies, will He forget us now that we are reconciled by the death of his Son? Can He be unmindful of the precious blood of His Son, when He numbers even the tears and the steps of His godly children (Ps. 1 v. 8)? Can Christ possibly forget in His life, those for whom he was willing to suffer death? Can He, throned in glory, forget those for whom He bore such awful anguish upon earth?"**

No, he cannot and will not. He whose hands were pierced with nails has inscribed your own name upon the palms of his hands (Isaiah 49:16). He will never forget us, for he can never forget himself, and it is himself—his very own flesh and blood—that he places inside us as we eat his body and drink his blood in Holy Communion. We are washed in his saving blood, remade in his image, and it is his name that is written on our brow.

In this life of grace and divine acceptance, yes, we still suffer. In this valley of sorrow, yes, we must bear many crosses, endure many temptations, and constantly cry out to God for help. But as we do, recall Jacob. Our stairway is none other than Jesus Christ, who is the sole way to the Father. He is our Bethel, our house of God, for in the temple of his flesh dwells all the fullness of the Godhead. Come what may, nothing can separate us from this divine stairway, this divine Bethel, for we are in him and he is in us.

**Amen**