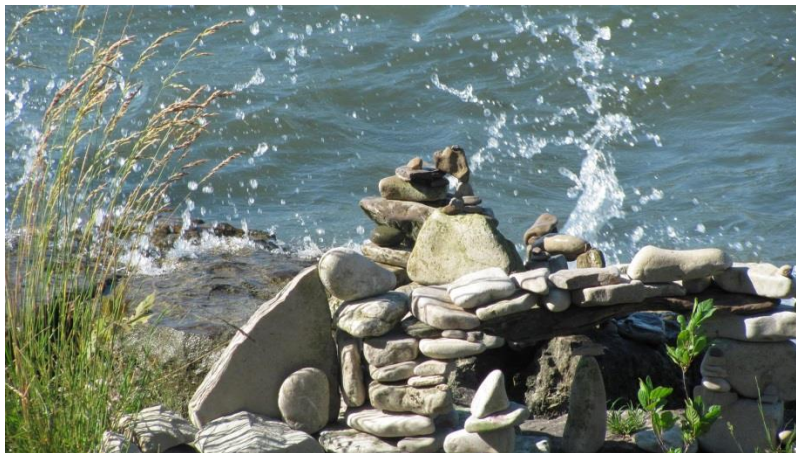


Patterns of Grace and Gratitude Week 2

Tuesday, April 20



Lakeside, Ohio

Jacob left Beersheba and set out for Harran. 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. Genesis 28:10-19

Jacob was a scoundrel his whole life. It was his pattern. And yet, God loved him. Jacob stole a blessing from his father Isaac, cheated his brother, Esau, out of his birthright, and swindled livestock from his father-in-law. Jacob had several encounters with God, always marking them with an altar that he built in that place. And as Jacob matured we see his spirit also changing.

This marking of encounters with God is something that is unique to people like Jacob. They are not perfect people but they are willing to be real with God. They believe in God's intimate engagement in this life. And in this act of creating the altar they are showing gratitude to God. This ability to recognize God's activity and relationship to us personally - requires openness to things that are not always logical. Each of us may have something that we didn't do right or omitted doing in our past. But in order to receive God's grace, we need to create a pattern of openness to the possibility of God's goodness and blessing. Not a blessing that we steal, but one that we receive when it is beyond understanding or explanation. And then, in our own way, we will build an altar of thanks to our God.