

September 24, 2017

I found myself relating to Jacob in this week's scripture. God has sometimes inspired me through dreams. I used to say it was the only time I was quiet enough to hear Him. Fortunately *that's* changed! And like Jacob, I grew up in a dysfunctional family with secrets and manipulations.

Although I've stolen no one's birthright (yet), I *can* raise some eyebrows when I mention that I used to be a wild girl on the back of a motorcycle. My daughters especially like these stories now.

But back to Jacob. When Jacob awakens from the dream he says, "God is in this place, and I did not know it."

This place. Where Jacob had only a rock for a pillow.

This place where Jacob felt completely alone, having just fled his home because his brother wanted to kill him.

This place. Where most of us would agree he "deserved" to be. Where he hadn't even dared cry to God for help.

But God reached out, past Jacob's shame, and continued being God, the loving mother. A mother who doesn't always wait until we can say we're sorry or see the error of our ways. Not because she's giving us a free pass. But because She knows it's not always a straight line between doing wrong and making it right. It reminds me of a phrase I have both loved and hated: We're all doing the best we can.

And God seems to say, "No matter what, you are mine."

I like this story by Jeffrey Bergeron, a Colorado author and host of Biff America. It's aptly titled "[We're All Doing the Best We Can](#)," and here's a slightly condensed version.

Sammy ruined Christmas; I'm trying to forgive him.

For those of us who are childless and far from family, Christmas is a time to be with friends who fill the void of real relations. For all of us the day goes much the same – morning gift giving with significant others, some sort of recreation in afternoon, then a gathering in the evening for holiday camaraderie. Sam is an old friend. Like many of us he came to the High Country when he was young and foolish, and like many of us – except for the young part – little has changed.

There were about five of the old vanguard that night, off in a corner, keeping warm around a whisky bottle and sharing stories of ghosts from Christmas past.

Also, in keeping with holiday tradition, we were bad mouthing absent associates.

On that particular evening, our old buddy Chico was our target.

Chico is not so much mean or malicious as he is clueless and careless. He does and says foolish things and has for the more than 30 years we've known him. Despite that, he can be good company and a good friend. But he is also the guy who will borrow your skis and return only one, use your bathroom and clog your plumbing, or ask your friend's wife, who has gained a few pounds, if she is pregnant.

In addition, Chico subscribes to every whack job conspiracy right-wing philosophy.

Chico no longer lives in the High Country, but he returns regularly to do and say foolish things.

We warmed up by reflecting on some of Chico's former faux pas and graduated to some of his more recent hits.

It was great fun – until Sammy got all warm and fuzzy on us.

"I know all the Chico stories," Sam said, "Heck I've told many of them but, after all these years, I think it's time to cut him some slack – Chico is just doing the best that he can."

It grew quiet around the whisky bottle. Only I had the courage to say what I assumed we all were thinking, so I shouted: "Everyone go home now – Sammy just ruined Christmas."

In truth, Sam didn't really ruin my Christmas but rather he gave me a goal for the New Year – remembering to be less judgmental and more forgiving because, in truth, we are all just doing the best we can.

I have few friends like Chico and many more quite unlike him. I sometimes wonder if any of us can take full credit or full blame for who we are and how we behave. Certainly you go down a dangerous path when you take accountability out of human equation, but I have found some people have an easier time being social, happy, productive and even compassionate than others.

We all know people who are fun, reliable, and good company, and we all know people like Chico. I would suggest it would be as hard for a normal person to be Chico as it would for Chico to be normal.

Although none of *us* have all of Chico's traits, I doubt that many of us think we are "normal". In one way that can be an advantage. It keeps us aware we need help. I love the imagery in Jacob's dream, with the angels going up and down the ladder. I'm pretty sure they're saying, "Here we are! How can we help?" Because, you know, there are times when we could use some divine intervention.

Just last week I had an especially bad morning in one of the classrooms. At lunch I prayed for a "Sign". Of what? I didn't know. Maybe, that I was okay, or that things were going to work out, or that I was in the right place.

When I went to the afternoon classroom, that teacher asked me for a favor. Could I please read with two students who had been absent and missed a lesson? Sure thing. As we sat together on the floor and enjoyed a funny story, I was back in that space, that *place*, where I know I am blessed and a blessing. And in the evening I was able to reflect on why the morning was terrible. I saw how I contributed to that situation, and decided to ask for advice the next day (which I gratefully received).

All of this happened in a much shorter time frame than Jacob's coming-back to reconcile with Esau – which did happen. And, yes, I prayed for help. But in the moment I didn't even know what I needed. I mostly just wanted to feel better. Yet grace was extended to me.

I'm hoping we can all extend grace, to others AND to ourselves. And that when we *are* suffering we will remember that God is right there *in that place* wherever we are.

BLESSED IS THE PATH

Benediction

By [Eric Williams](#)

Blessed is the path on which you travel.

Blessed is the body that carries you upon it.

Blessed is your heart that has heard the call.

Blessed is your mind that discerns the way.

Blessed is the gift that you will receive by going.

Truly blessed is the gift that you will become on the journey.

May you go forth in peace.