

### “The Journey”

One of the blessings of belonging to Grace Church, to a faith community, is sharing our journeys through life. Each one of us has a personal journey, a spiritual journey, our life experiences. Being a member of a parish church help us to share these experiences, celebrations, times of great joy (like a wedding), times of grief and sadness (as at a funeral).

Our individual journeys connect with the corporate journey our parish lives through our worship, our ministries and our mission. On the last Sunday in September we celebrate the anniversary of our founding. Our congregation was established on September 27, 1855, when members of Christ Church and St. Paul’s gathered to establish a new parish in the “west end” of Alexandria. Three days later, on the last Sunday in September (which happened to be the 30<sup>th</sup>), Grace Church celebrated its first worship service in the Lyceum, on the corner of Washington and Prince Streets. For the next two years our parish worshipped there on Sundays until the new church was completed on South Patrick Street.

Every Sunday we hear the stories of the journey that ancient Israel experienced as God’s “chosen people.” We celebrate the journey of Jesus’ life, death and resurrection. We learn about the experience of the church in its first century of existence; the missionary efforts of Peter, Paul, Timothy, John and others. When we celebrate Founders’ Day Sunday we either use readings and music for the “Dedication” of a Church or those for the Feast of St. Michael and All Angels, since this celebration is fixed in our church calendar on September 29<sup>th</sup>. This year we’re using Michael and the Angels, so we can reflect upon how angels, the spiritual forces of God, have helped us on our journeys through life.

Jacob had a vision of angels ascending and descending a ladder that connected earth with heaven. Jacob was running away from home after cheating his brother Esau, out of his birthright as the oldest son. Their mother, Rebecca, favored Jacob. She told him to leave home because Esau was so angry, he wanted to kill Jacob. Jacob is obviously distressed, so in his dream, in his vision he sees the angels God has sent to protect him. He also hears God tell him that he will always be with Jacob and He will guide Jacob back home.

Later in the narrative, Jacob is returning home and he has another dream. He wrestles with an angel, yet the angel is really God. Jacob won’t let go until God gives him a blessing. Jacob receives a blessing and is given the name Israel, meaning “he who struggles with God.”

For any of us who seem to be wrestling with God, Jacob’s story – his journey – can give us great hope. What are we struggling with? God is with us, angels will guide us. This is true for us in the journey of our parish at this point in our history, and it’s true for each of us on our individual journeys.

At the start of Jesus’ ministry, he tells Nathaniel that he will see “greater things ... angels ascending and descending upon the Son of Man.” There is no longer any need for a ladder to connect heaven and earth. Jesus connects us with God. Jesus brings heaven to earth. Jesus’ journey is always blessed by angels – at his conception when the angel speaks to both Mary and Joseph; during his temptation in the wilderness as Jesus battles Satan; in the garden before he is arrested; on the morning of the Resurrection. Angels are always there.

We don't know where the journey will take us, as a parish or as individuals. We do know that God is with us. We do know that angels will be with us to strengthen us, to bring God's word to us, to help us worship and praise God. This is what we celebrate today as we celebrate the 163 years of Grace Church's ministry and mission. And so, we too, will see "greater things.

Genesis 28:10-17

John 1:47-51