

What do you prize the most?

Your health, your family, something you inherited from an ancestor,...the list could go on and on. The first Lesson tells the story of a man who wrestled with this question.

The story of Jacob has been summarized in this way. “Jacob did everything, both right and wrong, with great zeal. He deceived his own brother and father. He wrestled with an angel and work fourteen years to marry the woman he loved. Through Jacob we learn how a strong leader can also be a servant. We also see how wrong actions will always come back to haunt us.” (NLT, page 67)

It took years for Jacob to sort out what he prized most, but when he finally got it right, his life began to have a purpose worth living for. The purpose worth living for is revealed in the account of Jacob’s dream at Bethel.

Exhausted from a 60 mile journey from his father’s camp at Beersheba, Jacob arrived in the area of Bethel. It was here that his grand-father Abraham made one of his first sacrifices to God in thanksgiving for safe arrival in the land God had promised him. Jacob does not seem to be aware of this. He goes about preparing to spend the night there and, not having pillow, he finds a suitable stone and settles down with his head on the stone.

As he drifts into a deeper and deeper state of sleep, he has an amazing experience. He dreams of a stairway reaching up to heaven and on it were angels of light ascending and descending. At the top of the stood the Lord God Almighty. God speaks to Jacob, just as God spoke to Abraham and Isaac, and promises to bless him. (Genesis 28:10-15) In this pronouncement God fulfills what his mother Rebekah had heard God say about the twins she was carrying. (Genesis 25:22,23) On waking up Jacob says, “Surely the Lord is in this place, and I wasn’t even aware of it. This is an awesome place...it is the house of God...the gateway to heaven!” (Genesis 28:16,17) God’s promise to Jacob becomes what Jacob prizes most for the rest of his life.

Up until this point Jacob had been consumed by envy and jealousy of his brother Esau who would inherit the largest portion of their father’s wealth on Isaac’s death, simply because Esau was born a minute or so earlier than Jacob. Through trickery and falseness Jacob had convinced Esau and Isaac to bestow on him the rights of the first born son. But, all his unloving behaviour threatened to catch up with him and he had left his family home in order to save his life. Now he

learns what the rights of the first born really are, and he is overwhelmed. In response, Jacob worships God by setting up his stone pillow as a sacred marker, a witness to God's promise to bless him, and his promise to worship only the Lord God.

Is your promise to God, is my promise to God, what we prize most? Do we make choices that bear witness to our belief, our trust, in Jesus Christ? What promise am I referring to? The promise made at our Baptism and confirmed at our Confirmation. What is the promise made at Baptism/Confirmation?

Our Lord Jesus Christ promises us individually, to receive us and to bless us, to release us from our sins, and to give us the kingdom of heaven and everlasting life. We, in response, promise to renounce the devil and all his works, to constantly believe God's holy Word, and to obediently keep his commandments. To enable us to fulfill our promise God gives us the Holy Spirit through Jesus Christ so that we are strengthened to fight against evil, and are endowed with the heavenly virtues of faith, hope, and love. (BCP, page 534-538)

In giving us the Holy Spirit we are adopted into the family of God, becoming members of the body of Christ, with the privilege, St. Paul explains in Romans 8:15, of addressing Almighty God in our prayers as "Father, dear Father."

How awesome it is to be able to come at any time, in any place, into the presence of Almighty God, the Creator of all that is and ever will be.

Your health, your family, something you inherited from an ancestor, etc., all have their places of importance in our daily life.

However, there is nothing greater for us to prize than having a loving relationship with God through Jesus Christ, our Saviour and Lord. Amen.