

**New Life Episcopal Church
Uniontown, Ohio**



Jacob's Ladder

**A Sermon for the 8th Sunday after Pentecost
July 19, 2026**

Preacher – Scott Bridges

[Eighth Sunday after Pentecost – The Episcopal Church](#)

Sermon for Eighth Sunday after Pentecost

[Genesis 28:10-19a](#)

[Psalm 139: 1-11, 22-23](#)

[Romans 8:12-25](#)

[Matthew 13:24-30,36-43](#)

Opening

If you trace the family story of Abraham, you don't find a line of spiritual superheroes. You find a genealogy of in-between people.

Abraham walks between homeland and promise. Isaac lives between sacrifice and survival. And Jacob – Jacob lives between deceit and blessing, estranged from Esau after grasping at the birthright, taking his father's blessing, and waiting on the future God intends to give **through** him.

And then one night, Jacob runs out of road.

He collapses in a barren place – a “certain place,” Scripture says – a **no**-place he never meant to stop.

He gathers a stone for a pillow. He lies down with nothing but the weight of his past and the uncertainty of his future.

He is **not** a finished man. He is not a pure man. He is not a confident man. **He** is an in-between man.

And that is exactly where God meets him.

Not in a sanctuary. Not in a moment of triumph. But in the in-between.

And that is where Scripture meets us today – in the mixed field, in the unfinished story, in the in-between.

Part I – The Human Condition

Jacob's story is ancient, but the in-between is not. It's where we live too, in the in-between.

Between who we were and who we are becoming. Between the choices we made and the consequences we're still living. Between God's promises and the fulfillment, we have not yet seen.

This isn't a flaw in the spiritual life – it *is* the spiritual life.

The Parable's Truth

Jesus' parable of the wheat and the tares names this reality with honesty.

The field is mixed. The roots are tangled. Wheat and weeds look the same at first. And the master refuses to uproot anything too soon – not because he doesn’t care, but because he cares too much.

God’s patience is not passivity. It is protection. It is mercy. It is the space where grace does its slow, steady work.

The Genealogical Truth

This is not just our story – it is the story of the family of faith.

Abraham is called before he understands. Isaac is spared before he knows why. Jacob is blessed before he is transformed.

This family – our spiritual ancestors – is a genealogy of in-between people.

People who carry both blessing and brokenness. People who inherit, plant, and tend their own mixed fields. People who live between promise and fulfillment.

The Human Truth

We are not finished. We are not pure wheat or pure weed. We are a mix – a field in process, a life in the in-between.

And if the in-between is the human condition,
then the grace of God is this:

the in-between is not empty.

It is the very place where God meets you and me –
as Jacob discovers on the hard ground of exile.

Part II – GOD Meets Us in Mixed and Barren Places

Jacob’s story is not just a story of a man on the run. It is the story of how God meets people in the places they never meant to stop.

Jacob stops in a “certain place” – *ham-maqom* – a phrase Scripture repeats three times, as if to say: slow down, pay attention. Something ordinary is about to become holy.

Jacob thinks he has stumbled into a **no**-place. But God has already chosen it as a meeting place.

This is the pattern of the Abrahamic family:

God meets Abraham under the stars. God meets Isaac on the mountain. God meets Jacob on the hard ground of exile.

God meets people in the in-between.

And Jesus' parable echoes this truth. The field is compromised. The enemy has sown weeds. The servants want to fix it.

But the master says no. Let them grow together for now.

Because the roots are intertwined. Because the wheat is still growing. Because God's patience is protection.

God does not abandon the field because it is mixed. God tends it.
God does not abandon Jacob because he is mixed. God blesses him.
God does not abandon us because we are mixed. God meets us — right where we are.

In the barren places. In the uncertain places.

God meets us in the in-between.

Part III — My Garden Narrative

When Scripture tells us that God walked in the garden in the cool of the day, it's telling us something profound: God meets people in gardens.

Not just Eden's garden — but the gardens we tend with our hands, and the gardens we tend with our lives.

Every one of us has a garden. Some tend children. Some tend aging parents. Some tend a demanding work life or wounds we didn't ask for. Some tend dreams that keep reseeding themselves.

And some of us — like me — have literally tended a garden.

I kept a good-sized vegetable garden: tomatoes, peppers, squash, broccoli, snap peas, herbs. And every year, no matter how carefully I planned, the garden had a mind of its own.

Last year's dropped tomatoes would **re-seed themselves** in places I never planted. Chives and mint would take over. Butternut squash would wander into every corner.

And this is the Midwest — where zucchini can go from blossom to baseball bat overnight. And of course — the weeds. Always the weeds.

Some things I planted on purpose. Some planted themselves. Some took over. Some needed pruning. Some things surprised me.

And **all** of it took careful watching.

Somewhere along the way, I realized my garden was teaching me the same truth Jesus teaches in the parable and the same truth Jacob learns in the wilderness:

Life is a mixed field — blessing and burden growing side by side.

And we heard last week Jesus tell another parable— the Sower scattering seed on all kinds of ground.

Sometimes the best tending happens before anything grows: turning the soil, clearing the rocks, uprooting last year's weeds, bringing the deep, dark, fertile earth into the light so it can mix with the surface. **Preparation and patience belong together in God's garden.**

And God meets us in the garden we are tending — even when we don't always know what's growing.



Part IV — The Ladder: God's Perspective and God's Path of Transformation

Jacob falls asleep in a place he never meant to stop. And in the middle of that nowhere, heaven opens.

He sees a ladder stretching from earth to heaven, and angels ascending and descending on it.

And the order matters. They are **ascending first** — which means they were already here. Already present. Already walking the ground Jacob thought was empty.

The ladder is not Jacob's achievement. It is not a spiritual accomplishment. It is not a reward.

The ladder is **grace in motion** — God moving toward Jacob before Jacob ever moves toward God.

This is the pattern of the Abrahamic family.

And God always descends first.

A. The Ladder Gives Us God's Perspective

From ground level, Jacob's life looks like a tangle of choices and consequences.

From ground level, the parable's field looks the same.

But from heaven's angle — from the vantage point of the One who sees the whole field — the difference becomes clear.

The ladder gives Jacob a new truth: **"Surely the Lord is in this place, and I did not know it."**

B. The Ladder Gives Us a Path of Transformation

The ladder is not just a viewpoint — it is a pathway.

Jacob's life begins to turn:

- from fear to courage
- from deceit to blessing
- from isolation to belonging
- from running to returning

This is the genealogical hinge — the moment the covenant passes.

Jacob will still wrestle, limp, and live in the in-between.

But the direction of his life has changed. The ladder has touched the ground.
And Jacob begins to become Israel.

And the same is true for us. God gives each generation a ladder — a moment of clarity, a moment of calling, a moment when the in-between becomes the place where God speaks.

C. The Ladder Connects the Garden and the Field

A gardener sees what the plants cannot. The master sees what the servants cannot. God sees what Jacob cannot.

And God sees what we cannot.

The ladder is the reminder that:

- God is already in the soil of our lives, tending the field, walking the garden
- God is already transforming the in-between

The ladder is the bridge between what is and what will be.



Part V — The Mixed Field Is Not the Final Word

Jacob wakes up with the same past, the same fears, the same unfinished story — but something has changed.

The **place** has not changed. Jacob has not **yet** changed. But the **meaning** of the place has changed.

The barren ground becomes Beth-el. The no-place becomes a holy place. The in-between becomes the doorway to God's future.

This is the pattern of Scripture.

Abraham's barrenness was not the final word. Isaac's near-sacrifice was not the final word. Jacob's deceit was not the final word. Joseph's pit was not the final word. Israel's wilderness was not the final word.

The mixed field is never the final word.

A. Jesus' Promise and Jacob's Transformation

Jesus promises that the mixed field will not remain mixed forever: **“At the harvest, the righteous will shine like the sun.”**

Jacob shows that promise in human form: the deceiver becomes Israel, the no-place becomes Beth-el, and the unfinished life becomes fruitful in God's hands.

The harvest belongs to God.

The timing belongs to God.

The transformation belongs to God.

The in between is not the end.

B. The Garden Teaches Us the Same Truth

The garden you see in June is not the garden you will see in August.

Growth surprises.

Growth returns.

Growth takes time.

The garden is never finished. And neither are we.

The mixed field is not the final word.

✿ Part VI – The Good News

Here is the good news.

The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob, the God who walks in gardens, descends ladders, and tends mixed fields—

is the God who meets you.

Not when your life is sorted out. Not when your field is weed-free. Not when your garden is perfectly tended.

God meets you **in the in-between.**

This is the gospel: **God descends before we ascend.**

The ladder touches earth before it reaches heaven. Grace moves toward us before we move toward God. Mercy arrives before transformation begins.

The angels are already here — ascending first, because they were already walking the ground we thought was empty.

The ladder is God's way of saying: **“I am with you in the in-between.”**

And God walks in the garden. God tends the soil. God brings the harvest.

The mixed field is not the final word. The gardener is.

And God is not finished with you.

The in-between is not the end. It is the place where God begins.

Part VII – The Closing Invitation

Beloved, every one of us has an in-between place: a field we are tending, a garden we are watching over.

Wherever that place is for you – **name it**. Hold it before God. Let it rise in your heart for a moment.

And this week, as we mourn two beloved members of our church family, we remember how deeply we come to know one another through shared stories – the ones spoken aloud, and the ones quietly lived. Their lives remind us that God’s great story of love has many paths home.

Because the promise of Scripture is not that God meets us after we have sorted everything out. The promise is that God meets us **in the in-between**.

So, I invite you, gently and honestly, to imagine your own mixed field: the wheat and the weeds, the hopes and the fears, what you planted and what reseeded itself.

Imagine your own garden – the growing places, the overgrown places, the barren places, and the surprising places.

And then – **imagine the ladder**.

Imagine God descending into that very place.
Imagine the angels already there – ascending first, because they have been walking your ground long before you recognized it as holy.

And then – **trust**.

Trust that God is tending what you cannot yet see. Trust that God is patient with roots that are still tangled. Trust that God is walking in the garden of your life, even when you feel alone in it.

And finally – **believe**.

Believe that the mixed field is not the final word. Believe that the in-between is not the end of the story. Believe that God is not finished with you – not by a long shot.

Because the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob – the God who walks in gardens, descends ladders, and tends mixed fields –
is the God who is tending you.

And the place where you stand – right now, today – may be more holy than you know.

Amen.