

Sermon for 19 July 2026 @ Bethesda UMC/Baltimore

Eighth Sunday after Pentecost

Scriptures: Genesis 28:10-19a; Psalm 139:1-12, 23-24; Romans 8:12-25; Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43.

Sermon: Today's first lesson is the unforgettable vision of Jacob and the ladder. He's on the run, not an admirable character, but a key figure in the Bible narrative that started with Abraham and Moses. He ends up well-behaved in this story, promising to worship Jahweh, or Elohim, if God will see him through the risky adventure he's currently on.

The psalm, Psalm 139, is so powerful we never give up memorizing its key phrases. Look it up and keep it near you; it will calm and guide you when you are most frazzled and afraid, all your life long. Suitably for today, it seems to represent someone who feels innocent of some serious trouble he or she is in or even if not so innocent, who needs God's rescue and whose words can calm us down when we are terrified and deeply worried.

Today's part of Romans is convinced that the world and the universe and everything in our hearts and minds is shaky and scheduled for massive alteration....not just because it's weak or wrong, but because God's in charge and is always doing more changing and creating than we can ever predict or even comprehend. It's really a beautiful viewpoint, but not one that puts you to sleep quickly.

Matthew's story about sowing and reaping is different than last week, because there's more than one kind of planter, and the second kind is crooked. The point of this outlook is good for us as church folk in particular, because it insists you bear with the crooked sower until the harvest, because we're all in need of forgiveness and of learning how to put up with one another, even as we want guide-posts and lots of negotiating as training in how the rest of the world needs teaching and accepting., as we do ourselves.

What all this brings up today for me is how many wholesome efforts are going on around us all the time. I brought some examples and am now going to pass them

around and ask you all to pick one and bring it back next week after you've read about it.

Do you read the stuff I send around, by the way, on the internet? I'd really like to shake us loose from our regular pews and spend part of worship reporting on the latest concern we have with and for Jesus.

Let us pray. Heavenly Father, loosen us free from our accustomed seats, both here and during the rest of the week ahead. Give us some new interest in sharing scripture with one another. Make us more holy, and also more good-humored both here and outside here, both with others and with ourselves. Make us holy, Lord. Mercy, mercy, mercy ... and day by day more willing and ready to sit still with you, seriously, in the lovely grace that envelopes us. We can grow. We do know how to talk to you and to listen to you. You are all, we can work with you, we are beginning again, in love. Amen.