

**St David's and St Michael's
Sunday 29th September
09.30 and 11.00**

**Gen 28 vs 10-17
Rev 12 vs 7-12
John 1 vs 47 - end**

**In the name of the Father, Son and
Holy Spirit, Amen**

**Well - what a week we have had in
the political arena - on both sides of
the pond. Many of us are left
feeling that the very foundations of
Liberal Democracy are under threat
and we are angry - and somewhat
afraid. You will be perhaps relieved
to hear that I'm not going to
comment on these 'Events' - except
to say that they have provided me
with the perfect introduction to
what I want to tackle in this sermon
- Deceit and Lies - and their
antitheses - Truth and Integrity.**

**I want us to consider each character
in our Scripture readings, briefly, in
turn:- Nathaniel, Jacob and the**

**Father of all Lies himself (not Boris
- not Donald) and see what were
the consequences of their
truthfulness or deceit - and what
we can learn from them.**

**First of all then - Nathaniel - He's
the archetypal good bloke isn't he?
Speaks the truth - and has a sense
of humour - as when Philip, another
disciple, said to him - Come and
meet the Messiah - and by the way
he comes from Nazareth. To which
Nathaniel retorts - Can anything
good come out of Nazareth. For that
little joke he got his come-uppance
- as we had read to us in our
Gospel.**

**What do we learn from this little
interchange. Well - sometimes
perhaps what you think is the truth
isn't the whole truth. After all
-something very good did come out
of Nazareth. (A one horse town but
what a horse!) Those of us who are
certain of our facts and like to be
forthright - straight down the line -
call a spade a spade and so on and**

perhaps throw in a wise-crack for good measure - Beware.

Perhaps it is worth adding that one should always temper truth telling with kindness. In that way it can be easier to bear. The last ten years of my working life in Hospice made me realise the importance of this.

There is a place for hurling truth in the face of denial - as in climate change or holocaust denial. But one rarely has a monopoly of the truth - and I suggest - a little humility is required - as shown by our Lord Jesus himself.

And then there's that curious reference to Jacob's ladder. A chance for Jesus to identify himself as the Son of Man / Son of God - but perhaps - also contrasting the honest Nathaniel with the deceitful Jacob.

Jacob learned deceit from his mother, Rebecca He cheated Esau, his elder twin, of his father's blessing by pretending to be his

brother, covering his arms with goats skin so his blind father would be tricked. Those of you aficionados of Monty Python will remember that Esau was an Hairy man but Jacob was a smooth man. Too smooth for his own good as it turned out.

He was on his way to his Uncle Laban when he had the Ladder experience of which more in a minute. There in Harran (modern day southern Turkey) he met Rachel, Laban's daughter, at the well and it was love at first sight - as you will recall. He worked on Laban's farm for 7 years for her (and - we're told - it only seemed like a few days - Aaaahhh - Young Love) - but - and here's the point - Laban was Jacob's equal in deception and on the wedding night Leah the ugly big sister was substituted in the marriage bed. Quite how Jacob didn't realise this is a mystery to me (unless he was drunk I suppose). (And he had to work another 7 years for Rachel as

you will recall) But -Here's my point - if your currency is deception and lies you might just get paid in deception and lies.

The first commandment is this:-

You should love the Lord your God with all your heart - and your neighbour as yourself. That's a truth we need to keep constantly in the front of our minds and practice.

For me however the other main lesson about Jacob is this : that deceitful though he was - he got the covenantal blessing of children and land. It was through him that the whole world, including you and me, was blessed. That on the face of it doesn't seem right but it illustrates perfectly just how much God loves us. He gives us second chances

Jacob dreamed of a ladder connecting him to Heaven. That surely was an instance of God's generous love - his grace. Jacob didn't deserve that love. but God

loved him as he does us and gave him a second chance - just as he does us.

So - Nathaniel was a Israelite in whom there was no guile - and Jesus commended him for it. Jacob had been deceitful - yet God nevertheless had a plan for him in his wider purposes, and that gives us hope.

What about our Reading from Revelation about the fate of the Father of all Lies himself.

I don't know about you but I find this Apocalyptic genre of Scripture challenging - to put it mildly. There is however a great truth very clearly stated in this fantastic scene describing the Cosmic battle between St Michael and the Angels vs Satan. That truth is - that the Father of all Lies has - been -defeated. He has been thrown out of Heaven. The Kingdom of God will prevail. The bad news is of course

that he is still prowling the earth awaiting the final judgement day.

There are times in our lives - and in that of our nation - when we wonder if Truth and Justice will prevail and we despair - just as the Psalmist does in Ps 73 and here I paraphrase:-

God I'm fed up to the back teeth with the lying, cheating, thieving prosperous sleek looking ruling elite. They're getting away with it Lord and you don't seem to care.

And God's response was :- Go into my sanctuary, there you will get my perspective on this and remember that their fate is in my hands.

That realisation doesn't absolve us from fighting for truth and justice of course but -dare I say it - there is a Divine Supreme Court of Justice where these things are adjudicated by - let's remind ourselves - a merciful God. It's not about revenge

but rather understanding a little bit more the balance between God's Love and Justice.

Which brings me finally to Snakes and Ladders- that well known Theological concept of course - and Board Game. In pursuit of ending up at the top and winning the game one can accelerate up the ladders - but you may also slither down the snake. And the biggest snake is fiendishly positioned at number 99 and takes you right back to numero uno.

What's my point - well - just as the Father of all Lies slid all the way down from Heaven so will we (and so will politicians) if we persist with our deceit and lies.

St D's only?

Part of the problem for us - and here I'm on dangerous ground perhaps - is that it's quite fun slithering down that snake - isn't it? Until you land in a heap at the bottom. The prodigal son did after

all enjoy 'riotous living in a foreign country' did he not - before the pig trough experience?

He only came to climb his ladder when he admitted his mistakes. It is the same with us.

Ladder experiences such as Jacob had when we get a glimpse of Heaven are few and far between and cannot be earned - they are moments of grace - but I do believe we should actively seek them.

How to do - you say.

**St Ds
Search the scriptures, join us in the Church Bible Studies if you can this Autumn - put time aside for reflection. Come on the Church Retreat with us to the Mill House on Saturday week.**

Music can transport us up the 'Stairway to Heaven' can't it? You may have other ways of connecting with God

St Ms

Search the Scriptures, Put time aside for reflection. This Church has a fine tradition for Music which can transport us up the 'Stairway to Heaven' Can't it?

But the important thing is this that we actively seek the Kingdom of God in our lives.

Let's pursue the ladders and look out for and avoid the snakes.

For those of you like me who recognise that we need forgiveness concerning these or other matters.

I close with part of the prayer from Ps 51. King David's great penitential prayer

David deceived and cheated another man in order to get his wife. And yet, repenting - became a great King of Israel.

Let us pray

Create in me a pure heart O God

And renew a right spirit within me

Do not cast me from your presence

Or take your Holy Spirit from me

**Restore to me the Joy of your
Salvation**

**And grant me a willing spirit to
sustain me.**

My sacrifice O God is a broken spirit

**A broken and a contrite heart - you
- God**

will not despise.