

Genesis 28:10-17

With some people, what you see is what you get. With others, appearances can be deceiving.

So let me introduce you to Jacob. He is one of the patriarchs. One of the founding fathers of the Jewish people, and so also of the Christian faith. Jacob's name means, 'deceiver'. And, he lived down to his name. Jacob was deceitful. He lived by pulling the wool over other peoples' eyes. Jacob cheated his older twin brother Esau out of the inheritance that belonged to Esau. As we meet him here, he is on the run. His brother wants to kill him and get his inheritance back. God is at work here too, in a way that might surprise us. If you thought that Jacob learned his lesson here and became an honest man, you don't know the story. Life is never that simple.

Let's listen: (read Genesis 28:10-17)

The gospel of John has much to do with appearances. All of us have been burned at one time or another by the Jacobs of the world. The aim of this gospel is to convince us that Jesus is for real, to believe in him and to have life through him.

I've highlighted all the references I could see that have to do with 'seeing', identity and with testimony.

Let's listen, and watch.

¹⁹ Now this was John's **testimony** when the Jewish leaders^[a] in Jerusalem sent priests and Levites to ask him **who he was**. ²⁰ He did not fail to confess, but confessed freely, "I am not the Messiah."

²¹ They asked him, "Then **who are you?** Are you Elijah?"

He said, "I am not."

“Are you the Prophet?”

He answered, “No.”

²² Finally they said, “**Who are you?** Give us an answer to take back to those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?”

²³ John replied in the words of Isaiah the prophet, “I am the voice of one calling in the wilderness, ‘Make straight the way for the Lord.’”^[b]

²⁴ Now the Pharisees who had been sent ²⁵ questioned him, “Why then do you baptize if you are not the Messiah, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet?”

²⁶ “I baptize with^[c] water,” John replied, “but among you stands one you do not **recognize**. ²⁷ He is the one who comes after me, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie.”

²⁸ This all happened at Bethany on the other side of the Jordan, where John was baptizing.

²⁹ The next day John **saw** Jesus coming toward him and said, “**Look**, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! ³⁰ This is the one I meant when I said, ‘A man who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.’ ³¹ I myself did not **recognize him**, but the reason I came baptizing with water was that he might be **revealed** to Israel.”

³² Then John gave this testimony: “I **saw** the Spirit come down from heaven as a dove and remain on him. ³³ And I myself did not **recognize** him, but the one who sent me to baptize with water told me, ‘The man on whom you **see** the Spirit come down and remain is the one who will baptize with the Holy Spirit.’ ³⁴ I have **seen** and I **testify** that this is God’s Chosen One.”^[d]

³⁵ The next day John was there again with two of his disciples. ³⁶ When he **saw** Jesus passing by, he said, “**Look**, the Lamb of God!”

³⁷ When the two disciples heard him say this, they followed Jesus. ³⁸ Turning around, Jesus **saw** them following and asked, “**What are you looking for?**”

They said, “Rabbi” (which means “Teacher”), “where are you staying?”

³⁹ “**Come and see.**” He replied.

So they went and **saw** where he was staying, and they spent that day with him. It was about four in the afternoon.

⁴⁰ Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, was one of the two who heard what John had said and who had followed Jesus. ⁴¹ The first thing Andrew did was to **find** his brother Simon and tell him, "We have **found** the Messiah" (that is, the Christ). ⁴² And he brought him to Jesus.

Jesus **looked** at him and said, "You are Simon son of John. You will be called Cephas" (which, when translated, is Peter^[e]).

⁴³ The next day Jesus decided to leave for Galilee. **Finding** Philip, he said to him, "Follow me."

⁴⁴ Philip, like Andrew and Peter, was from the town of Bethsaida. ⁴⁵ Philip **found** Nathanael and told him, "We have **found** the one Moses wrote about in the Law, and about whom the prophets also wrote—Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph."

⁴⁶ "Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?" Nathanael asked.

"**Come and see**," said Philip.

⁴⁷ When Jesus **saw** Nathanael approaching, he said of him, "Here truly is an Israelite in whom there is no **deceit**."

⁴⁸ "How do you know me?" Nathanael asked.

Jesus answered, "I **saw** you while you were still under the fig tree before Philip called you."

⁴⁹ Then Nathanael declared, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God; you are the king of Israel."

⁵⁰ Jesus said, "You believe^[f] because I told you I **saw** you under the fig tree. You will **see** greater things than that." ⁵¹ He then added, "Very truly I tell you, ^[g] **you^[h] will see** 'heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending on'^[i] the Son of Man."

John testifies to Jesus. John will become the first martyr. His life will be cut off as a party favour to a vindictive woman. John does not have much to say about himself. He will only say that, he is 'the voice' calling people to get ready to meet the Lord. John's concern, (like ours today) is not to be a witness to himself, we are not witnesses to ourselves, but only to Jesus.

Here is what John and the others say about Jesus:

He is, “the one who stands among you that you do not recognize”

He is “the one whose sandal straps John/we is/are not worthy to untie”

He is, “the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world”.

He is, ‘the one who has surpassed me/us because he was before me’

He is, “the one on whom the Spirit has come down and remained”

He is, “the one who will baptize with the Spirit”

He is, “God’s chosen one”. /Son of God

He is, ‘The Lamb of God’

He is, ‘Rabbi’ /Teacher

He is, ‘the Messiah, that is, the Christ’

He is, ‘the one Moses wrote about’,

He is, ‘the one about whom the prophets wrote’

He is, ‘Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph’.

He is, ‘Rabbi, Son of God, King of Israel’.

And he is among us. Do you recognize him? Do you know him? Do you trust him as really being all that he is testified to be? (How would we recognize him, what would be a sign that he is here?)

Recognize him or not, Jesus has a question for us.

‘What are you looking for?’

He asks this of two of John’s disciples who had turned from John to follow Jesus.

‘What are you looking for?’

*The Jewish people had all kinds of hopes for the Messiah. If you are a Jewish person looking for the Messiah, Jesus is your Messiah. But if you are not a Jew, Jesus did not insist that you first learn from the Bible and from the Jewish tradition how to spot the Messiah, and what to hope for from the Messiah, and then, receive Jesus as Messiah.

Jesus asks, ‘what are **you** looking for?’ It is a question addressed to all of us, as human beings. And it is deep. When U2 sings, ‘I still haven’t found what I’m looking for’, the whole world sings along.

Everyone has deep hopes for life. We have things that, ‘if only this would happen in 2011 it would be a very good year’.

Some of us want our families to get along, and not tear each other apart, but learn how to talk to each other in a way that builds up. Some of us want our families to be free of the burden of an addiction.

Some of us want to see our planet taken care of, others long for the day when all the hungry of the world will be fed.

Some of us want to be able to face our fears. Some are looking for love. Some of us want to figure out what to do with our lives.

What are **you** looking for?

In this gospel our longings are expressed as: bread, water, light, life, truth, the way. And to each of these human longings Jesus says, 'I am it'. 'Follow me. Trust me.'

In Jesus Christ God fulfills all human hopes, Jewish and non-Jewish, Christian and non-Christian. **Life** is here, in Jesus.* *(material between asterisks owes a debt to M. Eugene Boring and Fred Craddock in their excellent, 'People's New Testament Commentary p.292)*

'Where are you staying Jesus?'

Good disciple question. A disciple was one who went everywhere the rabbi went. These two want to know where Jesus is staying so that they can stay with him. A disciple stayed close to the rabbi and followed and watched and learned from the rabbi. There might be something to learn at any moment.

But the question was also a question in the early church. 'Where are you Jesus?' Where are you remaining, where are you living? And, it is a question for the church today. We've already had a great big hint from John the Baptist, '**among you**'!

Jesus says, 'Come and you will see'. Later, Philip says the same thing to Nathanael. Nathanael has pretty strong ideas that there is nothing much to be found in Nazareth. There are many people today who don't think there is much to be found in the church. Jesus says to the first two, Philip says to Nathanael, we say to all people, "Come and see". Come and learn from your own experience, come learn from this gospel of John where Jesus is staying today.

Nathanael follows Philip to Jesus. (now remember Jacob, the Israelite full of deceit?) Remember Jacob's dream?

Listen to Jesus: "Here is a true Israelite in whom there is no deceit!"

Nathanael is baffled that this person he has never met, knows him, knows where he has been, where he is going. Jesus always knows us first. We confess that we only come to him, we only look for him, anyone only looks for him, because Jesus has been looking for us first. (cf John 8:12)

Nathanael confesses Jesus.

And then Jesus makes this promise to Nathanael and to all who will believe and follow:

'You shall see greater things than these!'. You will see heaven open, and angels ascending and descending on the Son of Man.

Jacob saw the ladder in a dream. Jesus **is** the ladder, Jesus **is** the way to heaven. Jesus is the bridge between God and humanity. Jesus is Bethel, the house of God. Everywhere that Jesus is, God is revealed and dwells on the earth.

'Come and see'. Come and see for yourself, come travel along through the gospel of John. Invite others to come and see for themselves.

The Lord be gracious to you.

The Lord be gracious to me.

And, all God's people said, Amen.