

## **Warto być przyzwoitym: Rdz 28**

### **Introduction: Ordinary and special places**

Our family loves the outdoors. One afternoon we took the black and blue trails to the top of Mount Ślęża. As we sat near the lodge, eating sandwiches and dark chocolate, drinking tea and coffee from our thermoses, I noticed I saw two things. The first is a Church, built on the site where pre-Christian inhabitants of the region worshipped their Slavic deities. The second is less imposing: off to the right stands a stone statue of a bear, representing one of those pagan deities.

Despite the differences in their religious systems, those who made church and the statue believed that God would meet them there in that place. We see these signs that people put here to express their hope that God sees them, that he cares about them, that he will help them.

What about us? Do we really expect to meet God, here and now, in this place and in every place?

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### **[Wstęp: Zwyczajne i niezwykłe miejsce]**

Nasza rodzina uwielbia spędzać czas na świeżym powietrzu. Pewnego popołudnia szliśmy czarnym i niebieskim szlakiem na szczyt Ślęży. Kiedy siedzieliśmy w pobliżu schroniska, jedząc kanapki i gorzką czekoladę, pijąc herbatę i kawę z termosów, spojrzałem - i zobaczyłem dwie rzeczy. Pierwsza to kościół, zbudowany w miejscu, w którym przedchrześcijańscy mieszkańcy regionu oddawali cześć swoim słowiańskim bóstwom. Drugi jest mniej imponujący: po prawej stronie stoi kamienny posąg niedźwiedzia, przedstawiający jedno z tych pogańskich bóstw.

Pomimo wszystkich różnic w ich systemach religijnych, ci, którzy stworzyli zarówno kościół, jak i posąg, wierzyli, że Bóg spotka ich tam, w tamtym miejscu. Widzimy te znaki, które ludzie tutaj umieszczali, aby wyrazić nadzieję, że Bóg ich widzi, że się o nich troszczy, że im pomoże.]

A co z nami? Czy naprawdę spodziewamy się spotkania z Bogiem tu i teraz, w tym miejscu i w każdym miejscu?

## Family matters: 'It's complicated'

**28:1** Izaak przywołał zatem Jakuba. Pobłogosławił go i przykazał: Nie bierz sobie żony spośród kobiet kananejskich. **2** Wstań, idź do Padan-Aram, do domu Betuela, ojca twojej matki, i weź sobie żonę stamtąd, spośród córek Labana, brata twojej matki. **3** A Bóg Wszechmocny niech cię błogosławi, niech ci da wiele dzieci i pomnoży ich liczbę, abyś stał się zgromadzeniem ludów. **4** Niech On ci udzieli błogosławieństwa Abrahama, tobie i twojemu potomstwu, abyś posiadał ziemię, w której jesteś cudzoziemcem, a którą Bóg obiecał Abrahamowi. **5** Tak Izaak wyprawił swego syna i Jakub udał się do Padan-Aram,

What lies behind this final interaction between Isaac and Jacob?

Is Isaac simply taking the path of least resistance, bowing to Rebecca's request, who once more manipulates her husband to achieve her goals? Does Isaac in turn manipulate Jacob, by appealing to his close relationship with his mother? Note: instead of telling Jacob to marry one of his cousins, he tells Jacob to go to the house of Bethuel, his Mother's father, to find a wife among his mother's brother daughters. Perhaps he wants to avoid the shame of fratricide between his sons? Perhaps, despite his preference for Esau, Isaac cares about Jacob and wants to save his life?

Isaac felt all these things. But let me say this in his behalf. The blessing Jacob stole from Esau was meant for Isaac's first-born son. This blessing designated Jacob as Abraham's heir, the representative of God's people. Isaac at last recognized God's will and was fully on board with God's plan.

### Like father, Like son:

**6** Ezaw zauważył, że Izaak pobłogosławił Jakuba i wyprawił go do Padan-Aram, by stamtąd wziął sobie żonę. Zauważył, że gdy ojciec mu błogosławił, przykazał: Nie bierz sobie żony spośród kobiet kananejskich – **7** i że Jakub posłuchał swego ojca i swojej matki i poszedł do Padan-Aram. **8** Ezaw zauważył też, że jego ojciec Izaak jest niechętny kobietom kananejskim. **9** Udał się zatem do Ismaela i – poza żonami, z którymi już był związany – pojął sobie jeszcze Machalat, córkę Ismaela, syna Abrahama, a siostrę Nebajota.

Esau was 40 when he married two Canaanite women. This displeased his parents, but Isaac was also guilty, for failing to take steps to find a suitable wife for his sons. Esau took things into his own hands. Jacob was content to stay home and enjoy being his Momma's boy.

As we see from this story, life is more complicated than we think. This includes family relationships. As the story unfolds in later chapters, we see also that every decision has its own consequences.

Isaac and Esau liked to eat well and often placed their comfort and pleasure before far more important matters. Rebecca and Jacob used deceit to achieve their goals. They all paid for their mistakes. Neither Isaac nor Rebecca would see their son Jacob again. Esau lost his blessing as the first-born son. Jacob spent 20 years in exile; he would be deceived by Laban, and later by his own sons, and spent the latter years of his life believing his favorite son Joseph was dead. And yet, despite their human strivings and victories and failures, in the end God's will was done.

### **Standing in the presence of God:**

**10** Jakub tymczasem wyruszył z Beer-Szeby i udał się do Charanu. **11** Podczas podróży przybył na pewne miejsce, a ponieważ słońce już zaszło, zatrzymał się tam na nocleg. Układając się do snu, wziął sobie pod głowę jeden z leżących tam kamieni. **12** Gdy spał, przyśniła mu się ustawiona na ziemi drabina. Jej szczyt sięgał nieba, a po niej wstępowali i zstępowali aniołowie Boży. **13** Ponad drabiną stał Pan. Przemówił: Ja jestem Pan, Bóg Abrahama, twojego ojca, i Bóg Izaaka! Ziemię, na której leżysz, dam tobie i twojemu potomstwu. **14** Twoje potomstwo natomiast będzie tak liczne jak proch ziemi. Rozprzestrzenisz się na zachód i wschód, na północ i na południe. W tobie i w twoim potomstwie błogosławione będą wszystkie rody ziemi.

Jacob has his first personal encounter with God. Back then people invited travelers into their house and provided food and a bed. It was not an accident that Jacob was sleeping under the stars. God wanted to talk with him.

In the Bible dreams are often significant. Certain dreams revealed God's plans or played an important part in a person's spiritual journey. This dream confirmed for Jacob that God is working behind the scene, and that God has chosen him to fulfill the blessing and promise He first gave to Abraham.

The word here for ladder more likely means a stairway. When the Israelites heard this story, the image that came to their mind was a ziggurat in Babylon. These towers had stairs on one side leading to a flat place on the top, where they believed God would descend to meet with the king, the priests, and other mortals. In Jacob's vision the stairway reaches to heaven, and God himself stands at the top. Jacob sees angels going up and down. They are being sent on their missions by God and reporting back to God before their next mission. The communication between earth and heaven is

not unusual and occasional but normal and continual. As Jacob leaves the Promised Land, God reveals to him that just as He is present and active in Palestine, so He is present and active everywhere.

As the dream goes on the Lord speaks directly to Jacob. He makes the same promise to Jacob that he had made to Abraham and Isaac, regarding the land, the offspring, and the blessing that would come to the world through Jacob and his descendants.

From this place, this stairway and this blessing, Jacob has learned 3 things:

- He can count on God's presence wherever he goes.
- He can count on God's protection in whatever circumstances he finds himself in.
- He can count on God's promise to bless him and to bless the nations through him.

**But this is not all. God also has a personal word for Jacob!**

**15** Oto Ja jestem z tobą! Będę cię strzegł wszędzie, dokądkolwiek się udasz. Sprowadzę cię też z powrotem do tej ziemi, dlatego że cię nie opuszczę, dopóki nie spełnię tego, co ci obiecałem.

Jacob, the peace-loving Momma's boy, though some fault of his own, is going into exile. He fears he may never see his parents again. He fears that his brother, given the opportunity, will kill him. He is heading into the unknown, with no assurance he will ever come home again. He does not even have a place to sleep or a warm meal to eat. Yet God sees and knows all this, and in addition to reaffirming the Abrahamic Blessing he makes a special promise to Jacob. God's tells Jacob, in no uncertain terms, that he will be with Jacob wherever he goes, that he will bring Jacob back home safely, that he will fulfill all of his promises to Jacob.

## Jacob's Reaction:

**16** Jakub zbudził się ze snu: Z całą pewnością – stwierdził – Pan jest na tym miejscu, a ja o tym nie wiedziałem. **17** Zdjęty bojaźnią, dodał: Co za lęk budzi to miejsce! Nic tu innego, jak tylko dom Boga albo brama niebios! **18** Gdy Jakub wstał wcześniej rano, wziął kamień, który miał za podglówek, ustawił go niczym pomnik i polał z wierzchu oliwą. **19** Miejscu zaś temu nadał nazwę Betel, choć wcześniej nazywało się Luz. **20** Potem złożył tam Jakub ślub tej treści: Jeśli Bóg będzie ze mną i będzie strzegł mnie w mej drodze, jeśli da mi chleb na pokarm i szatę na odzienie, **21** i jeśli powrócę w pokoju do domu mego ojca, to Pan będzie moim Bogiem, **22** a ten kamień, który uczyniłem pomnikiem, będzie domem Bożym. Ponadto ze wszystkiego, co mi dasz, na pewno złożę Ci dziesięcinę.

How do you feel when you wake from a dream? Jacob felt awe, for he realized that he had been in the presence of God. Why? What was different about this place? It was just a lonely spot in the wilderness, no different than any other. And Jacob took an ordinary stone, no different from any other, to use for a pillow. Yet when he wakes from his dream, Jacob declares, “Surely the Lord is in this place, and I did not know it.” So what changed? Absolutely nothing. Except that Jacob’s eyes were opened to see spiritual reality.

Jacob takes his stone, this ordinary stone, and sets it upright as a pillar. In the ancient world, such pillars served many functions. They were used as a memorial for the dead, as boundary markers, and as a witness to agreements or treaties. They also served as symbols of the local deities. This stone is a witness, but it more than that, as is seen by Jacob’s act of consecrating the stone by pouring oil over it. He did not confuse this stone with the Lord God. Instead he declared, “This is the house of God, this is the gate of heaven”. This is the meaning of the name he gave this place: Bethel means ‘the house of God’. This stone would stand in this place, to remind Jacob of whom he had met here and what he had learned.

so Jacob made a vow. When I first read this I wondered if this was just another case of manipulating others, which seems to have come so naturally to Jacob, indeed to Rebecca and her family. But it is only natural that Jacob would pledge himself to the God who had spoken to him personally, who had promised to protect him and to provide for him. Jacob’s vow matches the content of God’s promise; the only thing he adds “if you give me food and clothing”. This sounds more like Isaac and Esau than Jacob. But it reflects the custom of the times, where a master or employer would provide food and lodging to his slaves, servants, workers and employees. Jacob thus accepts his role as God’s servant.

God's promise does not make prayer redundant. Jacob declares, "If you will do these things, then the Lord will be my God and this stone shall be God's house". Bethel did indeed become a site of worship. And Jacob, far from doubting God, by expressing his faith that God will provide for his everyday needs, indicates that he accepts his role and trusts that the Lord will keep his word.

## **Conclusion:**

This Passage speaks of God's presence, God's protection and God's promise [*obecność, opieka i obietnica Boga*], first to Abraham, to his descendants and through them to people of all nations. And God's makes this promise personal to Jacob. He says, Jacob, I see you, I care about you, I will be with you wherever you go, whatever you do. I will look out for you, I will provide for you, and I will bring you safely home.

Jacob's response was to give God all that he had. It wasn't much, just an ordinary stone and a few drops of oil for making bread. But in this way Jacob expressed his belief in the covenant God made with Abraham, and put his faith in the God who met him personally as he went on his way. That day the God of Abraham and Isaac became the God of Jacob.

What would it mean to stand in God's presence? How would our lives change if we knew that God always goes before us and behind us and with us? If we could experience life's joys and sorrows without fear, trusting that God will be with us and that he will bring us home?

*[Co to znaczy stać w obecności Boga? Jak zmieniłoby się nasze życie, gdybyśmy wiedzieli, że Bóg zawsze idzie przed nami, za nami, i z nami? Czy możemy doświadczyć radości i smutków życia bez strachu, ufając, że Bóg będzie z nami i że w końcu zaprowadzi nas do domu?]*

As I sat that day on top of the mountain, I read the sign hanging on the Church. It read Mount ŚLĘZY called Tabor. According to tradition, Mount Tabor was the site of Jesus' transfiguration, where his disciples saw him revealed in his glory as the Son of God. I was struck by how feeble our view of God's presence in the world really is. We take a piece of land where once people worshipped other Gods, and claim it for our God, when in reality God already owns it. Like ancient and modern pagans, perhaps even like Jacob, we have too limited a view of God's presence and protection and promise. I wrote a poem that day that I would like to share with you.

## Z GÓRY ŚLĘZY VEL TABOR

Zdobywanie gór dla Jezusa triumfalnego,  
Poświęcenie, oczyszczenie ich z wpływ pogańskich,  
To porażka dla wyznawców Jezusa ukrzyżowanego!  
To oddanie pozostałych gór lasów lak pól,  
Po których chodził Mistrz ze uczniami swoimi,  
Które stworzył słowem stwórczym,  
Które błogosławił krokiem ludzkim.

Joel Burnell  
11.09.2016

There is no place we can go that God is not already there.  
There is no place so dark that God does not see us.  
There is no suffering so great that God does care for us.  
There is no loss so great that he will not comfort us.  
And at the end of our journey, there is no doubt that he will lead us home.