In today’s first reading we encounter Jacob who is clearly roughing it. He has left his home in great urgency because he feels he is in danger. The fact is he has caused this situation himself by tricking his brother Esau into giving up his birth right. Jacob has angered his brother but also has shaken up the system of the time where the first born inherits the father’s wealth. Disrupting systems can be chaotic and dangerous, but sometimes needed. In Jacob’s case he was forced to leave everything he knew to seek out a new life for himself. Let’s face it he was not welcomed among his family and friends anymore, he had to start over. He did so completely alone. He did not take any servants or friends but truly went on this journey alone. I can only imagine what it felt like to sleep under the stars with his head on a stone in the middle of the desert. Imagine Jacob’s surprise to receive a vision as he slept, of a ladder that connected him with God and angels and observing them as they went up and down the ladder. Imagine Jacob’s surprise when after all the deceitful things he had done that God still let him know that the covenant he had created with Abraham was to be kept through him! What a miracle it must have been for Jacob in his moment of being an outcast and completely alone to understand that he was to carry on God’s covenant with humanity and creation. His response was awe and surprise. We talked a little bit about surprise at the Children’s bible story time. The feeding of the five thousand was the topic and the miracle of making a great gift of something that was scarce. Jesus did that. We see that happening in our daily lives too. Jacob who surely felt like he had little to offer or give at that moment realized how important even he was at that moment as a child of God.

Paul tells us: “For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God”. He is referring to the fact that we are all part of God’s creation and we all have the potential to grow into people that will help God’s ways of love, freedom, sharing of resources among all, and caring for creation in ways that are healing not economically beneficial. For Jacob, some refer to this stone and the revealing of God’s plan for him as his Ebenezer. A commemoration of Divine assistance. Jacob did in fact do a ritual at the place of his vision; This place where God assured him that he was blessed by God and was going to be a blessing to creation while here on earth. Jacob anointed that spot with oil and set a pillar around it. How do you commemorate the places where God has touched your life in life changing ways?

Paul tells us that we are more than just individual members or believers in Christ. He says that we are more than just the hands and feet of Christ. Paul says we are all heirs and children of Christ Jesus…this is a deeper more intricate connection to God than I ever imagined. This really speaks to how important we are not only as individuals but as people whose actions and words affect the world around us. It is not dependent on what flaws or mistakes we have made in our lives, it is not dependent on each and every sin, every faux pas, we have made. We are all guilty of making mistakes and sometimes huge failures of things in our lives but that needn’t take away are potential for doing God’s work in this world or the confidence and trust God places in us to do good in this world. Our impact may be big or small but it effects creation in ways that we can’t always know or imagine.

Our holy troublemaker today is from Kenya. Her name is Wangari Maathai. She grew up in an indigenous tribe called the Kikuyu tribe. She grew up in a Catholic family but her family who taught her many of the traditional Kikuya beliefs, some of which centered around creation. For instance, they believe that God whom they call Ngai, dwells on Mount Kenya. The people built their homes to face this mountain so they remembered where all good things came from. They believe that the fig tree was sacred and did not use it for wood. Wangari became a biologist and realized that this preservation of the fig tree was more than some superstition, but this tree actually played an important role in maintaining the ecology of the land. It helped protect them from landslides and was good for the soil. When Wangali left her home for grad school and university she came back to find that the land had been developed for large farms and development and even these sacred fig trees were torn down. She went to The UN meeting on womens rights in 1977 and proposed that they should plant trees. There was much opposition because politicians and developers tried to stop them. In this case the act of planting trees was an ecological form of civil disobedience. Wangari kept planting trees starting small and planting more and more. She was imprisoned and beaten. She joined with many women to plant 51 million trees in Kenya and received the Nobel Peace Prize. Trees in Kenya are signs of peace. She noted in her acceptance speech that many conflicts in this world are due to ecological crisis. I don’t know about you but this troublemaker was unknown to me before this week. She too had an Ebenezer in her 51 million trees. They are a commemoration that life and creation and sharing of resources serve God more than any development and accrual of gross wealth. Wangali is truly a woman who made a big impact on her country and the world.

Our gospel today talks about the blending of weeds and wheat in the field; An analogy for the good and the bad elements combined in one space. I think we can observe that in our world daily. But God does not discount the weeds or get rid of them does she? She says keep them around, they can be used for fuel when the harvest is reaped. If we look at this in the human life span we know that our potential to grow and do God’s work does not end throughout our whole life. People can change, people can turn around from doing sin and trickery like Jacob and still have a greater purpose in their lives of doing God’s work in this world and we can all have a positive effect on creation and each other. Brothers and sisters we are going through a rough time as a country and as a world but we must not give up. We can’t give up on ourselves or our fellow brothers and sisters in this community. We too are chosen to carry on God’s work in this world. You too our heirs and children of God.

**Perseverance**

by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

We must not hope to be mowers,  
And to gather the ripe gold ears,  
Unless we have first been sowers  
And watered the furrows with tears.

It is not just as we take it,  
This mystical world of ours,  
Life's field will yield as we make it  
A harvest of thorns or of flowers.