



I'm Yours, Lord

Sermon Notes • Week Three of Three — Series Finale

Genesis 35:1-7

"Arise, go up to Bethel... Put away the foreign gods that are among you, and purify yourselves, and change your clothes..." they gave to Jacob all the foreign gods that they had and the rings that were in their ears, and Jacob hid them under the oak... there he built an altar and called the place El-bethel.

Genesis 35:1-7, NRSVUE (condensed)

Following the Message

The return. Decades after Jacob first named this place "house of God" and immediately hedged instead of surrendering, God doesn't call him somewhere fresh for a clean start — God calls him back to Bethel, the same ground where the vow was first made. God doesn't meet us somewhere clean. He meets us back at the exact place we first fell short.

Foreign gods, defined. Not statues far away — whatever a household has quietly picked up and started trusting instead of, or alongside, God: money-fear inherited like furniture nobody remembers unwrapping; substituting niceness for real reconciliation (Matthew 5:23-24); showing up out of habit rather than encounter; choosing political loyalty over biblical principle. Jacob's household doesn't debate it — they hand it over, and it gets buried under the oak. Twenty years earlier he'd named the place *Bethel*, house of God. This time he calls it *El-bethel*, the God of Bethel — the difference between visiting a house and knowing whose house it is.

Widening to anxiety. *It all belongs to God* was never only about the offering plate. Your worry, your fear — they were never supposed to be yours either. "Cast all your anxiety on him, because he cares for you" (1 Peter 5:6-7). *Cast* is a deliberate heave, not a gentle setting-down — the same word family used for throwing cloaks over a donkey's back before Jesus rode into Jerusalem.

The backpack. Most of us carry anxiety alone and call it maturity — the way someone insists "I've got it" with a backpack too heavy for one person, shoulders visibly buckling. *Cast* doesn't ask you to earn anything. It asks you to let go of something you were never strong enough to carry in the first place. "The peace of God... will guard your hearts and your minds" (Philippians 4:6-7) — *guard* is a military word, a sentry standing watch.

Not a single "my" in the prayer. David, near the end of his life, prays over everything gathered for a temple he'll never see built: "Yours, O LORD, is the greatness... all things come from you, and of your own have we given you" (1 Chronicles 29:11-14). Not my kingdom, not my wealth, not my legacy — every possessive belongs to God. The only thing David claims is the question *who am I*.

Starting this fall. Treasure gets its own season. Starting in September, Pastor John Kyner and our Stewardship Ministry team will spend a full month here — because most of us are closer to Jacob's hedge than David's prayer when it comes to our own giving.

Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church

Rev. Dr. Ray Hammond, Pastor | Rev. Dr. Gloria White-Hammond, Co-Pastor

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Bethel AME
— Boston —

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Putting This Into Practice — The Full Arc

1. Three weeks ago: name a Bethel. Two weeks ago: find the *if* you were still carrying. This week: stop carrying it. Bury it, and build the altar with empty hands.
2. Three weeks ago: tell one renewal story. Two weeks ago: tell the hedge behind it. This week: tell it again, all the way through — a story you're still hedging on isn't a testimony yet.
3. Three weeks ago: name what you're founding. Two weeks ago: find the escape door. This week: close it. Hand it off. Today.
4. Three weeks ago: mark something as God's. Two weeks ago: erase the asterisk. This week: extend it to your worry, and mean it.

Two Things a Tree Can Teach

Coppicing (Week One) — cut back hard, a tree sends up new growth from a root system that never died. The root was never us. It was Him.

Tree rings (this week) — cut into a tree and every year gets exactly one ring: thick in good years, thin in hard ones, but never skipped, never erased. You can't tell from outside which years were hardest. Only in the cutting, only in looking back, does the whole pattern show itself.

Words Worth Knowing

Foreign gods — not statues; whatever a household trusts instead of, or alongside, God.

Epiripsantes (Greek, "casting," 1 Pet 5:7) — a deliberate heave, not a gentle release.

Phrourein (Greek, "guard," Phil 4:7) — a military term for a sentry standing watch.

El-bethel — "God of Bethel," Jacob's second, deeper naming of the place.

For Reflection

1. What's a "foreign god" your own household picked up without ever choosing it out loud?
2. Where have you been carrying something alone and calling it strength?
3. If someone cut into your last thirty-eight months — or years — and read the rings, what would the thin ones be? What would the thick ones be?
4. What does "I'm Yours, Lord" cost you to say all the way, with no *if* attached?

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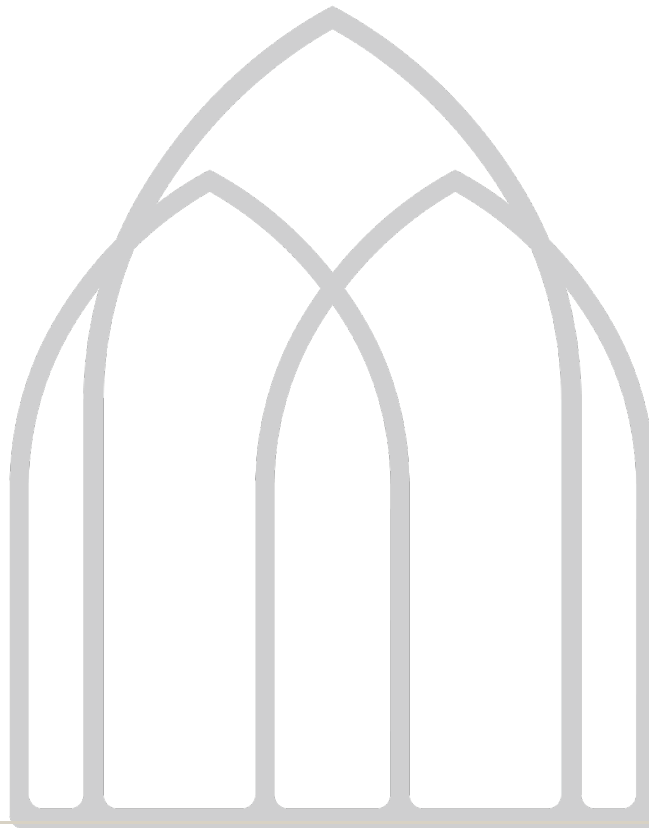


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Notes



It all belongs to God. Say it the way Jacob finally learned to. Not if. Not then. I'm Yours, Lord.

Today's closing song, "Fear Is Not My Future" (Kirk Franklin & Maverick City Music), was recorded live at a correctional facility and dedicated to the Mother Emanuel AME Nine — a room with every reason for fear, singing that fear isn't the last word.

Starting in September: the fall Financial Discipleship series with Pastor John Kyner and our Stewardship Ministry team.

In three weeks, the fall Financial Discipleship series begins.

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