

TFTD L9: Jacob's ladder

Today's TFTD comes from Robin.



Genesis 28.10-17

Jacob dreamed that there was a ladder set up on the earth, the top of it reaching to heaven; and the angels of God were ascending and descending on it. ... And Jacob said, "Surely the Lord is in this place—and I did not know it! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven."

When I was an ordinand, training to become a priest, I was given the assignment of designing and leading an all-age service. My church was in vacancy at that time. Our priest of 14 years had left to go to another church and we were being led by a retired priest who lived nearby. So it was to this priest that I went to explain what my assignment was. He asked me what was meant by 'all-age' service. They hadn't had this in his day.

You see, our church always did the services in the same way. Our services followed Common Worship with lots of Anglo-Catholic twirly bits but without any variation because of the season we were in. We lamented the fact that there were never any children in the congregation but that wasn't, in our view, a reason to change what we were doing. At all.

I tried to explain what an 'all age' service was. A service that might appeal to children but would also be appreciated by adults. But what would that look like in concrete terms? To discuss this in more concrete terms we looked at the lectionary

readings for the Sunday that had been allocated to me for this assignment. The Gospel reading was not especially inspiring and this was a problem because what normally happened at our church was that we read the epistle and the Gospel but only ever preached on the Gospel.

In some desperation I glanced across at what the Old Testament reading and found that it was to be the story of Jacob's ladder. This seemed more promising. What if we had a ladder at the front of church? And what if we read out the story of Jacob's Ladder, I preached briefly about angels being messengers of God and then we asked people to take a small angel and write on its wings what messages the angels might be carrying? Messages from God to the world. And messages from the world to God?

"Would that be 'all age' worship?" asked the retired priest. I said I thought it probably would be.

I looked online for ideas about how to make angels and I found a video of somebody making angels out of old-style wooden clothes pegs (the hingeless variety). They painted the clothes pegs white and cut out a set of wings out of cardboard and fastened the wings around the neck of the clothes peg. They looked great so I went off and bought clothes pegs and card from the pound shop on the high street.

It took me ages to make 50 angels. The whole family had to lend a hand and we finished them just before midnight on Saturday night. (note to self: choose quicker craft activities for all age worship!)

The next day as the congregation came into church they knew something different was happening. There was a 'ladder' on top of the chancel step. (In the event I had made a 'ladder' out of cardboard and bamboo canes). When we came to the readings, the sacristan read the Old Testament reading about Jacobs dreaming about angels going up and down the ladder. I spoke briefly about angels being messengers of God and invited the congregation to write messages on the wings of the angels and bring them up to pin on the ladder as the organist played.

As the angels were brought up to the chancel steps, I began to realise that something very special was happening. I read all the messages that people thought the angels might be carrying, messages from God to humanity and messages from humanity to God, and I was moved almost to tears by the depth of emotion that being expressed and by this small snapshot of the sheer scale of the constant

communication that is going on all the time between God and his people whom he loves so much and to whom he is always faithful.

After the service people came up to look at the completed ladder, festooned with clothes peg angels. We read each other's messages gathered round the foot of the ladder that went up to God. It was a wonderful moment for our church.



The day I left that church to start my curacy, the congregation gave me a small gift in a box wrapped in paper. I opened it in front of them and inside was a wooden clothes peg painted white with wings of card bearing a special message from God to me.

Robin Pye, 17th March 2022