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Parents' Weekend
University Public Worship

“Guarding Dreams”
(Genesis 28:10-16)

In today's epigram on the top of the program Jane Stanford claims, “there is only one failure for you and that is not to be true to the best you know.” Ideally, college is a time of challenging and confronting truths, of exploring and risking, of becoming acquainted with oneself. It is a journey into the unknown. I think of the relationship between the story of our students and that of the biblical teenage Jacob recounted in the book of Genesis (Genesis 28:10-16). Jacob's is a story of leaving home and beginning a pilgrimage to a place where the future is unknown. Many of you accompanied your children and celebrated their departure to Stanford, but Jacob went alone. His leave-taking was filled with complexity and a farewell blessing bestowed by deception. His first night away from home must have been fraught with demons, fears, imagined dangers and terrible loneliness. He placed his head on a rock and closed his eyes against the dark. And alone in the wilderness on a journey filled with the unknown, Jacob had a dream and he found comfort in it.

For while Jacob was alone in sleep, he was accompanied in his dream. Upon a ladder, firmly rooted in the place he was sleeping, but reaching up beyond his sight, were figures in motion, figures called in Hebrew *melachim*--angels or messengers. The *melachim* were ascending and descending—going forth and returning, rising and falling, mirroring dreams attained and dreams denied. In the transition from youth to adult, Jacob was not alone. Messengers accompanied him, messengers who helped him to know what

to strive for and how to cushion a fall; messengers who helped him to become the best he can be.

Whether Genesis is understood as a foundational book or simply part of the canon of Western literature, there is a parallel between Jacob's experience and our students' journey. Together with their peers, students make the transition from youth to adult in this special place, and in doing so, become members of a congregation of divine messengers. Together, we and they form a community across time and space, witnessing for one another the aspirations and the disappointments, the preparation for and the achievement of one another's dreams.

In the Biblical story, Jacob exclaims, "How awesome is this place! This is none other than God's house." (Genesis 28:17) And how awesome, too, is this place-- filled with friends, explorations, rituals, community. A place filled with messengers of vision, with those who help to imagine the heights to which our students might climb, filled with those who guard their dreams, allow their mistakes, cheer them along the way, and celebrate their journey.

In Jacob's story, God promises, "And here I am with you, and I'll watch over you everywhere that you'll go, and I'll bring you back to this place." (Genesis 28:15) And so it is with those whose truths are discovered here. For many students, this can be a sacred place, a place where youth meets adulthood, a place where dreams are guarded, where

students can discover their deepest truths, grateful for the messengers who stand guard during their ascents and descents and remember their dreams.

Shortly, we will hear from three students, generous in articulating their unique truth. And we, who have the privilege to accompany them and others like them, can once again listen and absorb the power, the opportunity and the honor of guarding dreams.