

“Wrestling, Wrangling and Limping!”
C Pentecost 19; Genesis 32:22-31
October 6, 2019; 10:00 am
Congregational UCC, Buena Vista, CO
Rev. Rebecca K. Poos

Genesis 32:22-32 The Message (MSG)

²²⁻²³ But during the night he got up and took his two wives, his two maidservants, and his eleven children and crossed the ford of the Jabbok. He got them safely across the brook along with all his possessions.

²⁴⁻²⁵ But Jacob stayed behind by himself, and a man wrestled with him until daybreak. When the man saw that he couldn't get the best of Jacob as they wrestled, he deliberately threw Jacob's hip out of joint.

²⁶ The man said, "Let me go; it's daybreak."

Jacob said, "I'm not letting you go 'til you bless me."

²⁷ The man said, "What's your name?"

He answered, "Jacob."

²⁸ The man said, "But no longer. Your name is no longer Jacob. From now on it's Israel (God-Wrestler); you've wrestled with God and you've come through."

²⁹ Jacob asked, "And what's your name?"

The man said, "Why do you want to know my name?" And then, right then and there, he blessed him.

³⁰ Jacob named the place Peniel (God's Face) because, he said, "I saw God face-to-face and lived to tell the story!"

³¹⁻³² The sun came up as he left Peniel, limping because of his hip. (This is why Israelites to this day don't eat the hip muscle; because Jacob's hip was thrown out of joint.)

WRESTLING AND WRANGLING, OH MY!

What do you wrestle with? What thoughts, issues, challenges, debates swirl around in your head and heart, waking you up at night?

What do you find yourself resisting and pushing against, or trying to get under control, like a cowboy wrangling ornery animals into the pen, only to have them burst out again at the drop of a hat?

Life—relationship challenges, circumstances seemingly out of our control, even our own recurring thoughts and unhealthy habits—can make us feel like we're in a wrestling match or even a rodeo a lot of the time!

Here are just a few of the things I wrestle with—to prime the pump of our thinking together—I'll ask you in a minute if you'd like to share anything from your own experience.

I WRESTLE WITH

--Never-ending-or-even-shrinking To Do list!

--Giving myself grace when something or someone slips off my front burner and I neglect to reach out to them respond to a need or request.

--Forgiving myself when I forget things.

--I wrestle with what people are seeking a church community. What are folks looking for and not finding? Why do they leave the circle from time to time?

--I wrestle, every day, when I read the news and social media with why we have such a hard time talking and listening openly. Why can't we honestly express our feelings and hurts? We shrink away and keep hurting, instead of sharing our hearts, and reconciling.

--I wrestle, every week, with what on earth to say in this week's message! What am I hearing? Where are people's struggles and joys in this place, this week?

--I wrestle with why we are so quick to criticize others' ideas and suggestions, rather than explore solutions together.

--With how to bring an experience of the healing presence of God into our worship.

--How to encourage us all to spend some "Kairos Time" together, soaking in God's presence and each other's warmth. Not looking at the clock or noticing who's *not* here, or thinking about the budget deficit, or whether we particularly like the song selection and style this week.

But, instead, being *present*, with the Holy, in this time set aside, in this sanctuary, with our hearts here and undistracted. With our monkey mind and linear time

turned off, and Kairos time turned on—God's time—for an hour, or so, or a little more....

--I (and we) wrestle with how to inspire us all to value and cherish this beloved faith community, and not feel like participation is a chore? How to make church a "get to" instead of a "have to."

--And, as pastor of this beloved faith family, how to care and give enough attention to so many needs, and the temptation to get stuck in the mud of details and non-essentials, while also leading us into a promising, God-guided and vital future.

WHAT DO YOU WRESTLE WITH?

With God? Others? Yourself?

JACOB'S WATERSHED MOMENT

Jacob has quite a story! Who was that wrestling match *with*, anyway?! Much is left unknown. Was it God? A human? An angel—or some other heavenly messenger? Even a river demon—a common character in that culture and time.

It's left to us, the interpreters, to put ourselves in the story and wrestle alongside Jacob. To make this our own story, and to find the blessing for our own experience and life going forward.

This was a watershed moment for Jacob—he was never the same after. He didn't even have the same name! But, he didn't know any more going in than we do when life grabs us and wrangles us to the ground.

Jacob did not know *what* was going on! Who was this Being? Was he even from Heaven?! Or maybe

somewhere else—much more dark and sinister? But, he stuck it out and stuck in there!

He demanded a blessing. That's some chutzpah, the old folks would say!! And, he limped forever more. Was *that* the blessing?

Oh boy! We don't want to go there! God doesn't *give* us maladies and expect us to call them blessings! That's not how the God I worship and follow works, anyway!

That not that different from the untrue truism: "God is testing me to see what I'm made of. Everything happens for a reason." Ever hear that?

After the fact. It's our *choice* to respond in faith. To find the blessing, the learning, the redemption of a tough situation.

Our divine lover and creator doesn't *create* those situations to trip us up, test our love or our mettle. They happen, and then the response is up to us.

And, depending on how we respond, as it was with Jacob, we might be forever changed after an encounter with our Divine Maker.

We might find ourselves limping in a way—whether literal or symbolic—because, perhaps, we went through the trials of night and awoke sending in the depths of our being that: *God was in this place, and I did not know it.*

BE LIKE JACOB! OR?.....

Life challenges us. In the night. In the day. We struggle, we wrestle—with all kinds of human and mysterious forces and situations.

So, how *will* we respond? Will we wrestle until dawn and beyond, and find no relief?

Will we continue to be a bit of a scaliwag, like Jacob—even after the encounter—not totally changed in character, obviously limping and scarred, but still beloved and used by God in powerful and profound ways?

Will we demand a blessing after the wrestling match and then wonder if we got what we wanted, when we end up limping?

How will *you* wake up in the morning after the loonnnngggg, dark night? How will you go forth into the new day with hope and promise?

Oh God, we wrestle. We come out limping, not sure if we've been blessed or not! Help us to receive all the blessings that come; to stretch and grow and walk forth in faith—into the new day, the sunshine and blue (or cloud or smoky!) skies, knowing you are surely in this place. Help us to know it. And show it! Amen.

Thy Will be Done – Kate

‘Thy Will Be Done’

Is not a statement of retreat or conciliation—but an ‘on tiptoes’ eagerness to see what the Father is doing in (and with) you.

“I remember one night being in my own wrestling match and turning to that Scripture and suddenly realizing that the angel was wrestling WITH Jacob -- and not against him. There was such a sense of empowerment rather than weakness. That the angel was actually an advocate and not an opponent.

He realizes that he can no longer live as Jacob -- a man who navigates the world as a competitor, but is now Israel, a man who knows no other way to be in the world, but "with the angel" -- he would rather give everything to Esau than have gotten it in a way that sees himself as separate from God -- as a man who must look out for himself and his "stuff" -- if God didn't give it to him he no longer wants it, and if He did -- there is nothing Israel can do to screw it up. His heart is free.”

ELLEN SIMS

“sacred messages can come to us in ways that are both scary and heavenly, both scarring and healing.”
“At daybreak the stranger is ready to move on. But Jacob now can't bear to be alone and holds onto the other for dear life. Jacob begs him not to go without giving him a blessing, unaware he's probably already received it. So the stranger confers upon him a new name with a counterintuitive meaning: *Israel*—“the person who struggles with God wins” (Gen. 32:28). Most religions have gods whose chief quality is

might. **But Jacob's God lets the weak ones win.** To lose in a wrestling match with this God is really to win.

“Wrestling with God means we do lose what we were wishing for in order to gain something better. We must lose our life to find it.”

Richard Rohr: “Wrestling with God, with life, and with ourselves is necessary. . . . *The blessing usually comes in a wounding of some sort and for most of us it is an entire life of limping along to finally see the true and real blessing in our life.*”

Some folks struggle through life and never are blessed with a deeper sense of God's priorities, God's presence, God's vision. Some people never struggle with scripture or with their own wounds or with life's deep questions and so never receive the deeper blessings. Some continue to grasp tightly at false certitude and possessions and self-images—never opening themselves to better blessings.

But God's grace can take life's inevitable wounds and convert them into blessing. (Ellen Sims)

Maybe you'd like to share from that experience of a wound that became a blessing