

Second Sunday in Lent
02/24/2013
Shepherd of the Hills Lutheran Church
Genesis 32:22-32
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I bring you grace, mercy and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

The Word of God for our consideration this morning is from the Old Testament book of Genesis the 32nd chapter.

Jacob came into the world fighting and striving. He was the heir to the promise of God to Abraham that He would make of him a great nation that would be a blessing to the whole world. Now normally the eldest son was the recipient of such a promise. Jacob wasn't the eldest. He was the second of twins. His striving, fighting for that which was normally the older sibling possession began as he was delivered from his mother's womb. Scripture says that as his brother Esau was born Jacob was holding on to his leg from the womb.

Jacob strove with his brother for the remainder of his life. He managed to wrestle away Esau's birthright and then the blessing from their father Isaac. This remained a source of contention for the brothers. In the story before us today Jacob is about to pass through territory belonging to Esau. He is afraid. He is not trusting that God will preserve him. He fears that Esau will attack him and his family in retribution for Jacob's shady dealings.

Jacob was the son of promise. Abraham, when he was confronted with the task of killing his son of promise, Isaac, moved forward following the command of God assured by faith that God would spare or raise Isaac from the dead. He knew that God would bring His promise to fruition.

Jacob's faith was not quite so bold. He saw danger everywhere. He saw the possibility for revenge from Esau as the tribe traveled through his territory. He did not believe as strongly as Abraham that God would in one way or another keep the promises He'd made to him. And so Jacob sent a party of people bearing presents into Esau's territory ahead of him. His thought was that Esau would be pleased with the presents and would not attack. Jacob and his immediate family stayed behind. Later Jacob sent his family and possessions across the river for safety. Jacob stayed by himself on the other side.

It was while he was alone that he was attacked by a Stranger. *“The same night he arose and took his two wives, his two female servants, and his eleven children, and crossed the ford of the Jabbok. He took them and sent them across the stream, and everything else that he had. And Jacob was left alone. And a man wrestled with him until the breaking of the day. When the man saw that he did not prevail against Jacob, he touched his hip socket, and Jacob's hip was put out of joint as he wrestled with him. Then he said, “Let me go, for the day has broken.” But Jacob said, “I will not let you go unless you bless me.” And he said to him, “What is your name?” And he said, “Jacob.” Then he said, “Your name shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel, for you have striven with God and with men, and have prevailed.”*

As Jacob sat alone in the dark a man came upon him and wrestled with him. But the man was no man at all. As can be deduced from the dialogue that follows the 'man' Jacob wrestles with is no man at all but rather God, in fact the pre-incarnate Son of God. Jacob is concerned about Esau. But for humans, for

all of us and Jacob our primary concern ought to be God. Jesus says as much when He says, *“And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell.”* Now I do not mean to imply that God prowls around looking to destroy us. That’s not God but rather the old evil foe, Satan, who does that. God is the one who in Christ pursues us looking to save. God pursues us in His Word bestowing faith on His creation at every opportunity.

God is our ultimate ally. He is the One who can be trusted to do everything He says. He cannot lie. He cannot fail to deliver on His promises. His desire is to save you, not to destroy you. If His desire were to destroy us we wouldn’t be here today. God sent Christ into the world because He wants to save the world and except for the world denying Him He has done just that. Jesus died that all might be saved. God is the best ally you can have.

But the opposite of that is God is also the worst enemy you can possibly have. To stand before God in His wrath is to stand in hell. If God is your enemy you’re condemned. You’re without hope. But again my friends you are here, that means that God isn’t your enemy. Rather He is and wants to be your Savior. If you have faith He is your Savior.

Same goes for Jacob. He is there fretting about Esau and his family and possessions that might fall within Esau’s grasp. He is scared. His past sins of treachery against his brother haunt him. As he is consumed by that fear this man begins to wrestle with him. Now it should be evident that God is only wrestling as a man and not according to the power He has available. It’s not plausible that

God wrestling to His ability will be overcome by a mortal. God wrestles here as a mortal would wrestle. He allows himself, with difficulty for sure, to be matched by Jacob.

Jacob is used to fighting. He's used to conflict. As he seemingly prevails Jacob seeks something from God and that something is a blessing. Jacob will not quit until the Lord blesses him. But it isn't easy. Jacob gives all he has and the best he can do is stay even with God. God ends the match by dislocating Jacob's hip. Even then, with no hope for defeating Him Jacob clings to God and will not let Him go until he blesses him.

Job also wrestled with God. Jonah wrestled with God. Peter wrestled with God. Paul wrestled with God. For none of these men was this 'fight' with God easy. In fact it was quite brutal at times. Job loses all he has including family. Jonah is cast into the sea and swallowed by a great fish and vomited up on the shore. Peter in the face of persecution denies he even knew Jesus. And Paul was struck blind as he faced off with God. But these 5 men all ended up with the same result. All five died in the faith. All five are saints in heaven today. They were all blessed with faith by God.

See this is how it is when you're the saved of God. It's stated no where that this life will be easy. We war against sin and death and the devil. We fight a sinful nature inside us that wishes to condemn us. Life is tough my friends.

And then we must also wrestle with God. Again He never seeks to destroy us. Rather He seeks to create faith in us and then He looks to exercise that faith. Look what Paul says in today's epistle, "*Through (Jesus) we have also*

obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God. More than that, we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us. "We rejoice in our sufferings?" "Suffering produces endurance leading to hope?"

That's not the way we think is it. We look at life with God, life in Christ as being easy street. But God says 'O contraire'. This is a sinful world. It's opposed to God and His Christ. Life isn't easy for the Christian. Sufferings aren't always the result of evil. And the evil that befalls us in this world is not without purpose. God uses and yes even causes unpleasantness in our life, but His purpose is to get us from this life to the next. You see eternity is the goal. Eternity is the reality. Jacob was worried about Esau when He should have had God on his mind. We worry about all manner of things, yet God should be primary in our mind and life.

If we were pampered in this life what would be the result? What are pampered kids like? Think we'd be any different? Because we brought sin into the world it's not possible for us to have everything as we wish it here. In Eden yes, but in a sinful world, no. Left to our own devices we would shortly destroy ourselves with all manner of idol worship. God would prevent that by disciplining us. He says in Revelation, "*Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline, so be zealous and repent.*"

Surely the woman in our Gospel lesson wrestled with Jesus. Her daughter was demon possessed. All the woman wanted was relief for her daughter. Jesus is at best cold when He says, "*I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.*" She was a Gentile and even worse a Canaanite. Jesus even implies because of her ethnicity that she is a dog. But she wrestles with Him and will not relent. He doesn't want her to. He wants her to exercise her faith and no matter what he wants her to hold on to the promises that are hers in Him the Savior.

He wants no less for you. Our temptation is to give up and think God is against us or worse, He doesn't care. He's not against you and He surely cares. That you are receiving the Word, that you are baptized and that you are offered the body and blood of Christ says that God loves you. It says that in Him your sins are forgiven and eternity is yours.

In those things you can endure through this life. In those means you have Christ. Paul says, "*I can do all things through him who strengthens me.*" That's where God wants you as well. He wants you to bear all things because you know that He is with you bearing you up in all things. Wrestle with Him. Ask for that which is according to His will over and over and over until you see its fruition. Do not allow the bad things in your life to direct you away from God. They're meant to turn you to God, not away.

Christ and His salvation for you is what's important in this life. By the power of the Holy Spirit God will keep those whom He loves in remembrance of that. Amen.

Now may the peace of God which passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.