

Wrestling With God

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October 16, 2022. Our readings today address head-on a significant truth about what it's like to be human in a world that's both beautiful and broken. Sometimes, like Jacob, we wrestle with God. But we come out of that wrestling more sure of who we are, as a child of God, more certain of what we're called to do.

Readings: [Genesis 32:22-31](#), [Luke 18:1-8](#)

*** Transcript ***

Have you ever felt like that persistent widow? Maybe you were wrestling with something and you just couldn't figure out what to do with it, and over and over and over you go and you ask. Maybe it wasn't a judge you were approaching, but someone else who had authority either to help you or to stand in your way, holding your future in their hands either for good or for ill. How persistent did you feel could you be with this person who seemed to hold so much power? Did your persistence pay off in the end?

Our readings today address head-on a significant truth about what it's like to be human in a world that's both beautiful and broken. Like Miss Katie was saying, so often in this world we wrestle and we have to earn justice, or struggle to try to do the right thing, when it doesn't feel like what we want to do. Or we struggle with illness, or sadness, or grief. We struggle with so many things. And we know that despite our best efforts, sometimes we go before that judge, we give it everything we've got, and justice doesn't prevail. Injustice, broken relationships, employment struggles, war, illness, death in our human experience here on this earth can make it seem as if the brokenness and the injustice have won, no matter how persistent we are.

And when that happens, we can be left feeling like we've failed somehow, as if we weren't persistent enough in our efforts and our requests. And if we've been praying for help, we can feel that we've been abandoned not only by the world, but even by God. Or perhaps, that we've failed God somehow, that our faith wasn't strong enough.

Our readings also reveal a profound and deep promise that God makes to us as people of faith. God, Jesus promises, is nothing like that unjust judge, who has no desire, he says, to do what is just. God, Jesus promises, will not delay. God does not wait for us to cry out long enough, or loudly enough, or the right way, or using the right words, before hearing our prayers.

And for those of us who may have been taught not to ask for help — anyone else in the room have that experience: we don't ask for help, right? We've been taught not to expect anything from others. There's another piece of good news here in our readings today: God, unlike the unjust judge in our story, or some of the judges in our own lives, will not be annoyed if we continue to persist. In fact, Jesus encourages us to cry out to God, day and night.

And in those times when we're facing the impossible — when the struggles and pain of this world seem like they're too much to bear, and God might as well be a million miles away for all the good praying seems to do — we can take courage from the story of Jacob. Jacob is in trouble. And he is not oppressed, as the widow was, but he is actually the oppressor in this story. Jacob, we're told in the chapters leading up to today's reading, tricked his father, and stole his brother Esau's birthright. Jacob hadn't seen Esau since then, and now Esau is on his way — with 400 men. That doesn't sound good,

does it?

And so, in the middle of the night, alone with his thoughts and his fear and his wondering what will happen when he and Esau meet, Jacob wrestles with God. Many of you may have had that experience. All night, Jacob wrestles with God, insisting that he will not stop, he will not give up, until he receives a blessing from God.

And after a night of wrestling, of refusing to let go until he gets what he needs, Jacob is blessed. And this time, it's not a blessing stolen deceitfully from his brother, but a blessing given freely by the God who loves us so much, as Miss Katie said — along with a new name, Israel, and a unique place in the history of our faith.

And Jacob goes from there on his journey, carrying his faith with him. (Miss Sandy made our flowers today, and she's got our faith packed, as you can see, in the suitcase on our altar.) He goes to face his brother, bringing his faith with him, and their complicated history, reminded that God goes with him because of a new disability, the limp he got from his night of wrestling. Think about that for a minute — Jacob's limp is a sign of God's blessing. He's been changed, and he knows now that God is with him, in a way he didn't before.

Because the prayer, and the wrestling, are not so much about changing God, and getting what we hoped for, as it is about changing us. We come out of that wrestling more sure of who we are as a child of God, more certain of what we're called to do. And that, in the end, is the blessing that Jacob was striving for when he deceived his father in the first place.

So when we're facing insurmountable challenges, we know what to do — we pray day and night, not because it's going to make God listen, but because God wants to hear us. God wants to hear our prayers. And when the injustices and pain of this world are overwhelming, and when the waiting is interminable, and when the journey is far too long and God seems to have forgotten us, don't be afraid to wrestle with God. The youth minister at my childhood church used to tell us it's okay to be angry with God sometimes, to tell God exactly how frustrated and hurt and exhausted you are. God, and my home church pastor, and my spiritual director, could tell you that over the years I've done my share of wrestling with God along the way.

And then, we can claim the blessing that God promises for us. God wants to walk with us, especially through the challenges life presents. This is the promise that we claim in our baptisms: God will be with us. God will not abandon us. We're given a new name: Child of God. And that changes everything about how we walk in this world.

And then, every week along the journey, we come bringing our faith with us in our suitcases. And we come to the table, assured of Jesus' presence in the bread and the wine, and in our bodies, and in our lives. We come to this table, as we talked about in class, as one way of many that we can pray. We connect with Jesus at the table each week, asking God to provide not just what is needed in our lives, but in the lives of all of God's children, just like mana and quail were provided everyday for the Israelites as they traveled for 40 years in the desert. And then we thank God for all that we have.

Claim this promise, Christ Lutheran family. Claim this promise as you face the challenges of your own lives, as you witness the brokenness of the world. God hears our prayers. God welcomes our wrestling. God feeds us, and all of our siblings. And we will be changed. We will be transformed. And there will be a blessing.

Thanks be to God.

*** Keywords ***

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