

‘Jacob, change and the blessing in the limp’

Jacob's story so far has been a complex one of complication, manipulation, betrayal, love, patience, family and blessing. You might think what else could there be to say about him. However, there is more for us to hear and learn about from Jacob. God reveals things *to* us and *about* us all the time, so we shouldn't be surprised that Jacob's story has much more to say. And today isn't any different as our journey continues with Jacob as he takes his family and household over the river ford of Jabbok where he will be meeting his brother Esau, the brother he tricked back in chapter 25. The brother who he isn't sure just how he will be received – peacefully and brotherly, or as one who is holding a grudge.

Jacob's story continues!

As usual what happened to Jacob wasn't easy and understandably, he had another a very difficult night, as he's sent his family across the stream, he's now on his own again with his own thoughts – or so he thought. During the darkness of the night came a moment in time when he had little certainty, limited strength and a growing fear that still demanded he take action. I think in this instance we might share a commonality with Jacob. In the wee hours of the night, we also wrestle with God, we know we have things to do. Things that we're not so sure that we have the capacity or the gifts and skills to do. Whilst we may not believe we have the capacity or the gifts and skills to do; God grants us the strength we think we don't have. God's generous love comes forward, and we're given what we need to accomplish God's direction for us.

Jacob's answer comes in what he does. He knows he needs to meet Esau despite the heavy weight on his shoulders as he asked himself, "I wonder what Esau will do" Jacob has no control over what's happening. To preempt the meeting, Jacob sends gifts ahead of him as presents to Esau, therefore Jacob splits his camp into manageable parts, as an act of hope that is practical, humble, and somewhat fragile. Then, in the darkness, he wrestles with what is often interpreted to be God or perhaps an angel, but the uncomfortable and difficult truth that his own willful taking of what he wants must give way to dependence on God to deliver. This part of Jacob's story is centered on surrendering our whole selves to God and making the decision to change. When Jacob is finally touched on his hip it's put out of its joint/it becomes painful, Jacob receives a lifetime limp which reminds him he can't rely on himself anymore so must rely on God.

The result isn't immediate comfort, but a changed identity and Jacob's name changes to Israel. Like others who had gone before him, he had a name change signifying that his past strategies and self-sufficiency don't have the last word. He doesn't want to move on from the encounter without hearing a blessing, in Jacob's case the blessing is the limp as he walks away marked, but also a changed man. He learns that offering what he has may look like submitting what we can which is our time, our plans, our fragile faith all the while trusting that God can be effective even when we feel and acknowledge our own inadequacies.

Many of us here today are facing or have faced nights that resemble Jacob's, long sleepless nights, where we've wrestled with the sheets, thoughts, even our torched dreams, seasons where prayers feel dry, responsibilities feel overwhelming, and our best efforts still seem to not be enough. It's worth noting that God uses those moments to call us to move

forward anyway with whatever we have the capacity to offer. It could be to make a difficult apology, engaging in an honest conversation, being consistent in acts of kindness, a prayer whispered without confidence, or a decision to pursue peace rather than protection. The 'wrestling' might be resisting anxiety, confronting hidden habits, or stepping into situations requiring courageous efforts. Jacob's story so far reminds us that God often blesses while reshaping us, using both our fear and our weakness as places where faith becomes more real. When we feel our own limitations are crowding us in, we don't disqualify ourselves, we simply allow ourselves to be re-formed so that our reliance shifts from control to trust.

Jacob's encounter ends with a promise of blessing and a new name, but it begins with movement, with Jacob doing something, splitting the camp, sending the gift, going toward the meeting, and wrestling honestly. Where we might be called, then, is toward our next faithful step, offering what we have with open hands, especially when we already know they mightn't look sufficient when our eyes turn toward the standards of others.

As Jacob's story continues the sun rises and it becomes his turn to rename the place where he was wounded. He calls the wrestling place 'Peniel' saying, he's seen God face to face and survived.

From this we learn the importance of remembering and naming the places where God shows up and challenges us. These 'Peniels' where God meets us in the darkness. These are places where we lose and find our true names. These are places where mystery wrestles us towards understanding what a magnificent gift of eternal life Jesus gave us. These are places where we exhaust our own strength and finally collapse into God's hands.

These are the holiest of places, the places that leave us blessed and limping all at once. May we brave these places over and over again, because God is in them, ever ready to meet us. may we prevail over them each time the night fades, the moon rises and recedes again as the sun rises. May our aches be the testaments of our complete change and joy.

Amen