

Sermon Drama
Genesis 32: 22-32

Wrestle with God, receive the blessing.

This morning _____ read for us an account of Jacob's saga, his trials and tribulations. Let us now turn to Jacob and ask him about his most recent problems and challenges, and how he is facing them.

Jacob, with a crutch, limps on and takes a seat.

Interviewer: Jacob, where have you been, and what have you been doing, lately? Last we heard you married Leah.

Jacob: I have been staying at my Uncle Laban's home in Haran. I ended up marrying the two sisters, Leah and Rachel. Between them and their maids, we have had eleven sons and a delightful daughter, Dinah.

Intrvr: Oh my, you have been busy! So, you are happily married, settled and raising a family?

Jacob: I am as happily married as a man can be trying to look after two wives--well, really four women, and all those children vying for my attention. But honestly, I am not really happy living under my father-in-law's roof. He has sons of his own. He treats me, my wives and our children like foreigners. My heart feels restless. Restless dreams fill my sleep.

Intrvr: Restless dreams. We remember when you fled home, how you dreamt that first night after you fled from Isaac and Esau's anger. That was the dream about the stairway to heaven, the zigg-oooh-rat, wasn't it? With God standing by you saying, 'I am with you. I will keep you. I will see you home.'

Jacob: Right, and now, a restless stranger in Laban's home, I dream again. This time God says to me, 'Return to the land of your birth.'

Intrvr: That sounds like a good solution, you return to the Promised Land to live happily ever after?

Jacob: Well, it is not quite as easy as all that. Laban, my father-in-law, even though he treats me and my wives--his daughters-- like foreigners, he does not like losing me and my family as workers on his estate. He does not want us to leave and take all that belongs to us with us, especially all the sheep and goats I have raised.

Intrvr: He is not happy to see you go. So... getting away from him is fraught with anger and grief?

Jacob: Exactly. He confronts us and wrestles with us about some stolen household gods. What do I want with his old household gods? He just wants to pick a fight, have a court case go before the village elders so we cannot leave. But finally, we leave him behind to face what lies ahead.

Intrvr: And what lies ahead is the homecoming God has promised, right?

Jacob: It would be great if it were all that simple.
But when I left home, Esau, my brother, burned red hot with anger, and rightly so. I wronged him.
Now as I leave Laban behind, I think to myself, ‘Jacob, look at all the open land between here and Esau.
Maybe I should NOT go back across the Jordan River to Canaan, but just find a nice patch here in Lebanon and settle down.

Intrvr: You feel afraid to make the amends to Esau that you have to make?

Jacob: Sister, I have wrestled with that challenging scenario countless times. The outcome is never pretty. I do not want to face my elder brother and admit my guilt..

Intrvr: So, what do you do?

Jacob: Truth be told, I am not terribly brave. I cowardly send the family ahead of me. I figure if Esau is still murderous with rage, he will kill them before me?...

Intrvr: What?! Are you serious?

Jacob: I know, I know, but a terrible fear grips me.
I send my family with all sorts of presents for Esau, gifts to atone for my sin, hoping they will cool his rage against me.

Intrvr: And then?

Jacob: Another restless, sleepless night.
And in the darkest hour of the night a man seizes me.
At first I think it is Esau. But it is not my brother.
I tell you, I have never fought like that. /cont....

Minutes become hours. My opponent exhausts me.
In the end, I know I cannot defeat him, so I just cling to him. Then he strikes my hip and dislocates my leg.

Intrvr: Yikes! What happens next?

Jacob: Even though the dislocation agonizingly pains me, I do not let go.
Finally he breaks his silence saying, ‘Let me go for day is dawning.’ And I have a strong sense that this is no ordinary man.

Intrvr: Why do you say that?

Jacob: Even though he is the victor, he does not want me to see his face! I wonder, ‘Who can this be?’
I am really curious now.
I know I cannot beat him, but I can hang on.
I can persevere, until the dawn, and then I can see his face, at least I think I can.
So with him wanting me to let him go, I ask for something in return.

Intrvr: What do you ask for?

Jacob: I ask for a blessing,
a blessing that my father-in-law never gave me,
a blessing I got from my father only by trickery.
He asks me my name. I tell him, ‘Jacob’ which means heel or follower. Indeed, I feel like a heel!
Then he blesses me saying,
‘No longer shall you be called Jacob but Israel,
for you have striven, wrestled, with God and prevailed.’
With that, he disappears.

Intrvr: So Jacob, or should I say Israel?

Jacob: Let's go with the new name, Israel. I like it.

Intrvr: Israel, what have you learned from all this?

Jacob: I have learned that one must face life's challenges, like the apology, the amends I need to make to Esau, even though I fear facing him. I must.

I have learned that we must not get caught up with our own desires, or stuck in our own comfortable ways. The world changes, and God expects us to change with it.

I have learned that we are to be about doing God's will and building God's kingdom.

And that takes work and dedication on our part, often long and hard.

Sometimes it means wrestling from dusk til dawn. Sometimes it means facing challenges and problems for years and years. Remember, I worked for my father-in-law for 21 years.

Perseverance. This is what I have learned.

Intrvr: Thank you, Jacob.

Jacob: Keep on keeping on. *Limp off.*

Worship Leader:

Perseverance.

Pray with me.

God, thank you for your love which perseveres, touching our lives, not just in an hour of worship but every day.

Your steadfast love attends the world, day in and day out, year in and year out.

Grant us perseverance, like Jacob, to stand steadfast in our convictions, and to hold on and wrestle with the truths we face.

Grant us wisdom to know the difference between stubbornness and perseverance.

Help us see when it is time to stand firm and when it is time to humbly move on, to make amends, and to be reconciled.

Grant us perseverance and peace in all we do.

This we pray through your Spirit of Truth. Amen.