



## **Nineteenth Sunday after Pentecost Sunday, October 20<sup>th</sup>, 2019**

### **Even the Righteous Limp**



#### **Jacob wrestling with the Angel**

**Christian faith is an altogether more complex thing than we often give credit for. The name Israel probably means “He struggles with God”, and that is what faith often involves – struggling with God, wrestling with God, limping as we try to make sense of things.**

**Among the readings for today, the Hebrew reading, Genesis 32:22-31 is the most remarkable. It concerns the struggle of Jacob with an Angel who appears to be God. What stands front and centre in the story, among other things, is the way in which God is experienced by Jacob as both protector and opponent. Within the theology, is the warning that for even, and especially believers, God will not always be the one we might hope or want God to be as we strategize, perhaps ‘plot and scheme’ our ways – even in a good sense – through life. Israel’s construal of God in Jacob’s story, is both as benefactor and as adversary – its ‘crippler’, judge and opponent. In other words, believers – neither Jews nor Christians – enjoy a monopoly on the right side of God: we all limp.**

## GATHERING

### Announcements

#### Greeting

In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit  
 The Lord be with you  
*and also with you*

#### Lighting the Candle

Hymn: Gather Us In (TiS 474, Gather Us In, Marty Haugen)

#### A 'Beginning Prayer' about Struggling with God and Life

This prayer written by the poet Michael Coffey concerns today's Hebrew reading about Jacob's struggle with the Angel, or more accurately with God. It depicts faith and belief as not about doctrine or concepts, but about relationship and the struggle that always ensues whether it is with God or with each other. The poem also pushes us to understand that faith is no recipe for success, as contemporary evangelicalism and Pentecostalism tend to promote – the so called "prosperity Gospel". Instead people of faith often "limp" as we struggle with the conundrums of life and God's action or apparent inaction within it.

Because I journeyed too close to the event horizon  
 because I dreamed deeper...  
 because I wrestled the mystery, coming to comprehend myself  
*because I knew silent-stillness is not the only holy way*

I limp with a hip socket struck by marvellous pain  
 I limp with an ego wounded and the wound a blessing  
 I limp a survivor from a close encounter with the Other  
*I limp slower and wiser from the battle*

I could have walked briskly away from the One hiding among us  
 I could have danced on with a smooth sliding stroll  
 I could have run tremulous from the Infinite Unknowable  
*I could have feigned my gait as if I were free of divine wrestling*

Do you walk hiding all your out-of-joint questions and doubts  
 Do you slip away from the ring when the bell sounds three  
*Do you hide from the God who would rather have a wrangle*

than let you walk on without knowing you are known

**Amen**

**The Peace**

**SMG**

## **BREAKING OPEN THE WORD**

### **Some Insights about Us and God**

Shortly before, the famous Swiss psychiatrist and psychoanalyst Carl Jung died, he was interviewed by a writer from the magazine, *Good Housekeeping*, who asked what his idea of God was. "To this day God is the name by which I designate all things which cross my wilfull path, all things which upset my subjective views, plans and intentions and change the course of my life for better or worse."

**Alex Wilkinson, Jacob's Struggle with the Angel, The New Yorker, June 15<sup>th</sup>, 2015**

In the process of the Genesis reading about Jacob (Genesis 32:22-31) Jacob the Deceiver, for such is the meaning of "Jacob," received a new name, Israel, which likely means "He struggles with God." Most important and unlikely of all, at the conclusion of that riverbank struggle, we read that God "blessed him there" (Genesis 32:29).

**Daniel B. Clendenin**

In the words of the theologian Henri Nouwen, the hope is that Jacob, having wrestled with God, leaves the River Jabbok as a "*wounded healer*," not as a wounded wounder. The hope is that he will learn from his injury and use his experience to heal others, not to wound them out of his woundedness.

**Carl Gregg**

## Genesis 32:22-31

Barry Lloyd

Our lectionary reading skips over most of Jacob's stay with his uncle Laban, and in today's reading we find him arriving back at the border of the promised land.

His life has not changed much. He is still the same old deceiver and the various relationships he has or which surround him are marked by deceit and cheating: Jacob and Laban (30:25-43); Rachel and Laban (31:19-21); his wives Leah and Rachel (29:31-30:24). Laban's sons complain that Jacob has taken 'all that was our father's' (31:1). Jacob's earlier deception of Isaac springs to mind.

As Jacob arrives back at the border of the promised land, his home, struggle is again the order of the day. He has to deal with Esau whom he cheated long ago and he is fearful (32:7-8). He prays to Yahweh, recalling his dream and Yahweh's promise (vv. 9-12). The promise of progeny and of Yahweh being with Jacob, which has proved true, is now in jeopardy. The situation gets worse as Jacob seeks to appease his brother with gifts, at the same time as he plans a back-door escape for himself (vv. 13-21) in case things do not go well. That brings us to our text: Jacob is alone at night, on the bank of the river Jabbok, a tributary of the Jordan River (32:22-24a). He wrestles with an unnamed assailant, in Hebrew an 'ish, a 'man'. The opponent cannot prevail against Jacob so he injures Jacob's hip (v. 25). In spite of this he cannot get away from Jacob and is afraid of the approaching dawn. Jacob demands a blessing before he lets him go (v. 26). Now Jacob is good at weaselling blessings out of others, but they are usually important characters. Who is this opponent? Everything in the narrative from here on (vv. 28-31) indicates that he has been wrestling with Yahweh himself.

<sup>22</sup>The same night he got up and took his two wives, his two maids, and his eleven children, and crossed the ford of the Jabbok. <sup>23</sup>He took them and sent them across the stream, and likewise everything that he had.

<sup>24</sup>Jacob was left alone; and a man wrestled with him until daybreak. <sup>25</sup>When the man saw that he did not prevail against Jacob, he struck him on the hip socket; and Jacob's hip was put out of joint as he wrestled with him. <sup>26</sup>Then he said, "Let me go, for the day is breaking." But Jacob said, "I will not let you go, unless you bless me." <sup>27</sup>So he said to him, "What is your name?" And he said, "Jacob." <sup>28</sup>Then the man said, "You shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel, for you have striven with God and with humans, and have prevailed." <sup>29</sup>Then Jacob asked him, "Please tell me your name." But he said, "Why is it that you ask my name?" And there he blessed him. <sup>30</sup>So Jacob called the place Peniel, saying, "For I have seen God face to face, and yet my life is preserved." <sup>31</sup>The sun rose upon him as he passed Penuel, limping because of his hip.

## Psalm 119:97-103 and 105

Barry Lloyd

By its sheer length Psalm 119 dominates Book V of the Book of Psalms. Its length also dominates the interpretation of the psalm. These 176 verses are homage to the *torah* or 'teaching/law' and its significance in the life of one who fears Yahweh. Psalm 119 uses synonyms in order to reflect upon the torah or law. Eighth words are used. They are translated in the NRSV: 'promise', 'word', 'statutes', 'commandments', 'decrees', 'precepts', and 'law' respectively. The words 'way' and 'faithfulness' are less frequent but could be added. While these words are synonyms for torah, they each add their own nuance to our understanding of what the torah is about.

<sup>97</sup>Oh, how I love your law!

***It is my meditation all day long.***

<sup>98</sup>Your commandment makes me wiser than my enemies,  
***for it is always with me.***

<sup>99</sup>I have more understanding than all my teachers,  
***for your decrees are my meditation.***

<sup>100</sup>I understand more than the aged,  
***for I keep your precepts.***

<sup>101</sup>I hold back my feet from every evil way,  
***in order to keep your word.***

<sup>102</sup>I do not turn away from your ordinances,  
***for you have taught me.***

<sup>103</sup>How sweet are your words to my taste,  
***sweeter than honey to my mouth!***

<sup>105</sup>Your word is a lamp to my feet  
***and a light to my path.***

## Luke 18:1-8

Gill Lloyd

Luke 18:1-8, a strange and difficult story that Jesus tells about the so-called Unjust Judge. Some points worth making include: first, we are told at the beginning that Jesus tells this parable so as to underscore the importance of prayer when offered in faith. That is so, but the issue is about the purpose of prayer – justice (*dikaïos*) which appears no fewer than five times in this short reading and which translates the Hebrew idea of *mishpat* – doing justice to the poor. So, the reading is about faith as a verb that does not give up on the Kingdom – see the Lord's Prayer as an example (Luke 11: 1-4). Second, that if anything, God in this story is not the authority figure of the unjust judge, which is where we tend to place the emphasis. In fact, the imagery points us in the opposite direction: to the vulnerable, victimised widow, just as Jesus himself finally becomes, set as he ultimately is, before an unjust Pilate at his trial. The point of the story is that faith prays for and lives out Biblical justice which is really about mercy,

not the sort of justice that is a synonym for brutality, so common in many legal systems, even today.

18 Then Jesus told them a parable about their need to pray always and not to lose heart. <sup>2</sup> He said, "In a certain city there was a judge who neither feared God nor had respect for people. <sup>3</sup> In that city there was a widow who kept coming to him and saying, 'Grant me justice against my opponent.' <sup>4</sup> For a while he refused; but later he said to himself, 'Though I have no fear of God and no respect for anyone, <sup>5</sup> yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will grant her justice, so that she may not wear me out by continually coming.'" <sup>6</sup> And the Lord said, "Listen to what the unjust judge says. <sup>7</sup> And will not God grant justice to his chosen ones who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long in helping them? <sup>8</sup> I tell you, he will quickly grant justice to them. And yet, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?"

The Gospel of the Lord

***Praise to you Lord Christ***

**Hymn: Seek O Seek the Lord (TiS 464, Venantius James Phillip McAuley)**

**A Film Clip - The Name of the Rose – Umberto Ecco (30:25–34:30)**

The Name of the Rose is on its face, about a murder mystery in a famous Benedictine Abbey in northern Italy. The progressive thinking Franciscan, Brother William of Baskerville, who has come to take part in a debate about the Church and the priority or otherwise of its call to poverty rather than wealth – a real theological and ethical issue in the late Middle Ages – turns his intellectual acumen to resolve the question of the murder of a number of brothers. The story is not however just about a murder or two, but about theology and thought: namely Christian theology as a doctrinal affair that is closed to further learning, for all has already been said, or theology and faith as an open enterprise which uses the wits and reason to open up new vistas of inquiry.

In the scene, we see a confrontation between Br. Jorge, a leading figure in the abbey and William about laughter. In it we get a sense of the closedness of Br. Jorge and the inquiring, creative mind which is often a problem for the Christian Church

## Offering

### Doxology

***Praise God, from whom all blessings flow,  
praise him, all creatures here below,  
praise him above, ye heavenly host,  
praise Father, Son and Holy Ghost.***

### Prayer of Dedication

### Prayers of the People

The one who prays, says at the end of each petition, “may we be less certain of ourselves”, and the people respond, “more certain of you”.

### Lord’s Prayer

Let us say the Lord’s Prayer

***Our Father in heaven,  
hallowed be your name,  
your kingdom come,  
your will be done,  
on earth as in heaven.  
Give us today our daily bread.***

***Forgive us our sins,  
as we forgive those who sin against us.  
Save us from the time of trial  
and deliver us from evil.***

***For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours,  
now and forever. Amen.***

하늘에 계신 우리 아버지여

이름이 거룩히 여김을 받으시오며  
 나라이 임하옵시며  
 뜻이 하늘에서 이룬 것 같이  
 땅에서도 이루어지이다.  
 오늘날 우리에게 일용할 양식을 주옵시고  
 우리가 우리에게  
 죄 지은 자를 사하여 준 것 같이  
 우리 죄를 사하여 주옵시고  
 우리를 시험에 들게 하지 마옵시고  
 다만 악에서 구하옵소서  
 대개 나라와 권세와 영광이  
 아버지께 영원히 있사옵나이다. 아멘

**Closing Hymn: Great God your Spirit (TiS 416, Jerusalem, Alan Gaunt)**

**Blessing and Sending Out**

Christ is life!

Let us live  
 with perception and discernment,  
 without fear, with imagination and courage  
 even as we limp

Our service has ended

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord

***In the name of Christ***

**Going Out: May the feet of God (TiS 779, Aubrey, Aubrey Podlich)**

**Musical Postlude**

**Organist:**

John Hughes