



“Together We Do More: Wrestling with God”

Twenty-second Sunday after Pentecost
Saturday and Sunday, October 15 – 16, 2016

All Services

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Camp Hill, Pennsylvania

Genesis 32:22-31; Psalm 121;
2 Timothy 3:14–4:5; Luke 18:1-8

You've heard it said that, "Variety is spice of life" but, at this time of the year, it seems as if Pumpkin Spice is the spice of life! It's in our hand soaps, lattes, lagers, Oreo cookie filling; there was even a sign outside an auto mechanic shop in West Chester that says, our motor oil contains pumpkin spice. As people of faith, we know that neither variety nor pumpkin are the spice of life, but rather the Author of life, Source of love, the Holy Spirit promised in baptism, so let us begin with a prayer.

Gracious and loving God, may our encounter this morning result in the growth of Your kingdom and Your holy will be done, through Christ our Lord.

The preaching text for this weekend is: Jacob wrestling a divine visitor.

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks in his book, "Not in God's Name" calls this story the Supreme enigma!!! Remind me to thank your lead pastor for inviting me to be the guest speaker on the supreme enigma! Put simply, I believe this story is about: God giving an identity. The people of Israel get their name from this text. And we join into that identity through Jesus, as people who hold on to God even as God holds on to us. We "do-life" in this wrestling / embracing type of way that we call FAITH, a FAITH that leads us to behave and act a certain way to HELP OTHERS & BUILD UP the kingdom of God.

Jacob (literally = heel-grabber), the Bible says he came out grabbing after his older brother's heel. Jacob wanted to be Esau. Esau was described as physically strong. Esau was quick to please their father. Jacob was not skilled as a hunter, but he was thoughtful, even cunning... The context of this wrestling match with angelic being is: It was the night before Jacob was to see Esau again after 22 years of not going to the family reunions because the last time they were together, it was reported to Jacob that Esau wanted to kill him. They were at odds because Jacob had tricked their father into giving him the blessing of the first-born even though Jacob wasn't the first-born (Can you believe that God's covenantal promise is forever intertwined with this mixed up family?! – It should give us hope, right?! God will work with us as well). I believe that night Jacob was wrestling not only with an angelic visitor, but he was wrestling with existential truth. We all wrestle with this. Who am I? Who have I been in the past? Who will I be in the future?

Jacob had spent a good portion of his life wanting to someone else. Wanting to be the son who was loved by their father; wanting to be the one rule over others, but the night of wrestling changes all of that. His name is changed by the divine being. He will no longer be known as heel-grabber, but he will be content to BE HIMSELF, THE ONE WHOM GOD MADE HIM TO BE. The one who strives and survives – being blessed by a divine presence.

The next chapter confirms this new identity – for the meeting with his brother Esau goes well, and he offers him wealth and blessings and gifts – bows down before Esau and Esau embraces him. Then it says in Genesis 33:18 that Jacob returned home from that encounter – safely, in peace, limping, yes, from the angelic encounter – but the direct translation says he emerged complete – whole – in tact.

That is what God invites you to in a life of faith. A complete-ness. Wholeness – an identity that leads and enables you to let go of your fears of not being enough or having enough, and embracing the One who gave up everything on the cross for our sake; THE SPIRIT OF GOD IN JESUS GIVES US A NEW ID AS A WHOLE, BELOVED CHILD OF GOD.

You might say, that is all well and good for Jacob, I mean Israel, but sometimes, God seems distance and elusive, not nearly as close as a wrestling partner. We all wrestle with the concept of how small we are how big, expansive, unknowable God seems. I like an insight from Pastor John Ortberg, who likened a life of faith to air flowing through a small tube. Imagine God as something massive – like the Gulf stream, the warm water and air current the flows from the Gulf of Mexico along the East Coast and out across the Atlantic Ocean. Scientists will tell you that the gulf stream is 62 miles wide, 3000 feet deep, and travels an average of 5 mph. And here we are – tiny little humans...like a little drinking straw...and yet the gulf stream can pass through this straw IF the straw aligns itself with the gulf stream. That is like God's power flowing through our lives. And we align ourselves with God through – prayer – worship – bible study – acts of service – Christian fellowship – and GIVING / GENEROUSITY.

Many have already completed the estimate of giving form. If you have not, please do so TODAY. Giving and committing to giving IS another way align ourselves with God's work and power. Some may struggle with how much to give – is the Biblical example of a tithe, 10% of income, possible? What about starting with some percentage and growing toward a tithe? I know the leaders of this congregation wrestle, as all congregations do, with how to make the most of the gifts entrusted to its care. I know they wrestle with how to have a relevant and vibrant witness to the good news in the 21st century.

Perhaps the children can instruct us in this. Last summer, children in the Cave Quest VBS sang a song, 'My Hope Is in The Lord.' Here are a few lines of the song:

I fix my eyes upon the God who GIVES
Cause all I need is what I have from Him
That's why my hope is in, "My hope is in the Lord"

That song says it all to us as stewards. All we need is what we have from God. And we are called to share it for the sake of the kingdom.

A final illustration involves a simple act of kindness witnessed by pastor as she watched video footage in the aftermath of the bombings in early September in northern NJ and NY. She said she was watching the news coverage, and in the background you could see a young boy,

probably middle school age sitting on the back of an ambulance, awaiting treatment for minor injury; as he sat there, an elderly man approached, hunched over and shuffling slowly; the boy hopped down from the back of the vehicle, and helped the elderly man into the back of the ambulance; he then sat next to him as they both awaited help. It was just a simple act – but a profound one. Profound because, not only was the boy helping the man, but more importantly, the boy was helping himself! Helping to get outside of himself; get beyond his own pre-occupations with his hurts and worry and helping a fellow traveler. This is known as the grace of giving. And it is why it is our joy to be faithful stewards.

For Jacob it was all a matter of identity. An identity given by God. So too, we have a God-given identity to live into God's redeemed, God's beloved, God's faithful stewards. A people wrapped in the embrace of the One who does not let us go – until we are blessed.

And now to Him who is able to accomplish abundantly beyond all we can ask or imagine, to Him be glory now and forever. Amen.

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