

We need to grab onto God in prayer - Genesis 32: 22-30

The message for this morning is from the first reading of today: Genesis 32:22-30. Let us pray: **“Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight, Oh Lord, my Rock and my Redeemer.”** Amen

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Dear Christian friends:

In the gospel lesson today, we see the very important lesson that God wants to teach us today. We are told **“Now Jesus was telling them a parable to show that at all times they ought to pray and not to lose heart.”** This is an important lesson, for at times we may all feel that our prayers are not doing any good, or that they are falling on deaf ears. We may ask: does God really want to answer our prayers? We know that God makes some wonderful promises in His word concerning prayer. Jesus tells us: **“Whatever you ask in My name, it shall be given to you.”** And James assures us: **“the effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much.”** And yet there are those times when we pray, but God is silent. We ask, but He does not seem to answer.

Sometimes it seems that prayer is nothing more than a struggle with God, and that we are fighting a losing battle. But what God wants us to learn today is the lesson that Jacob learned through his struggle with God at Peniel. We need to learn to be persistent in our prayers, for God is good. He loves us with a never ending love. And He is always willing and able to bless us beyond what we even ask. When it seems that we have to struggle with God in prayer, we need to remember to be persistent, for truly God will hear and answer all the prayers of His people. We may wonder why our God, who loves us so much would make us virtually wrestle with Him in prayer. But we can learn something of His purpose through the example of Jacob, one of the more colorful characters in the Old Testament.

The name Jacob means supplanter, one who lives by tricks and treachery. And that describes this man. He had lied to his father Issac and deceived him; he had tricked his brother Esau out of his birth right. And when Esau swore that he would kill Jacob and get his revenge, Jacob fled far away to live with his uncle Laban. And while Laban was less than fair to Jacob, Jacob was still up to his old tricks in the way he dealt with his uncle.

But now his past was catching up with him. God had told him in a dream to return to his homeland. And Jacob obeyed God. But he still feared his brother’s reaction. And when word came to Jacob that Esau was riding out to meet him with 400 armed men, he was afraid for his life and for the lives of his family. So he divides his family and flocks into two groups, hoping to buy time for the one group to escape in case of an attack. He had also sent gifts ahead to his brother.

And having done everything that he can do, he still is worried and afraid, and in his fear he cries out to God in prayer. Jacob’s prayer is written before our text. He prays **“O God of my father Abraham and God of my father Isaac, O Lord, who said to me, return to your country and to your relatives and I will prosper you, I am unworthy of all the loving kindness and of all the faithfulness which You have shown to your servant; for with my staff only I crossed the Jordan, and now I have become two companies. Deliver me, I pray, from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau; for I fear him, lest he come and attack me, the mothers with the children. For You did say, I will surely prosper you, and make your descendants as the sand of the sea, which cannot be numbered for multitude.”** Genesis 32:9-12

Then Jacob sent his family across the ford of the river, and he is left alone with his thoughts and fears, left alone to pray. But he is not alone for long. We are told that a man came and wrestled with

him. Where this man came from, or how the struggle begins is not told to us. But we do learn the identity of this man. He is more than a man, for as Jacob soon realizes, he is struggling with God Himself. But by his actions, Jacob had been struggling against God all along.

Jacob had lied, deceived and used people. Now Jacob was afraid of Esau because of the things he had done, but in this physical wrestling match, God shows Jacob that Esau is not the problem. His attitude toward God is the problem. God wanted to bless Jacob. He had already chosen him to be a patriarch of the chosen people. But the blessing had been withheld, because Jacob, by his actions had sinned not only against his father and brother, but also against God. And in this struggle which involved Jacob body and soul, God deals with him for the best. He shows him the errors of his past. He brings from him a confession of all he is, simply by asking him his name, for when Jacob speaks his name, he tells God just what he is: the crafty and deceitful man.

But what is really important is that Jacob does not give up. He clings tightly to God in this struggle so that we are told he actually emerges the winner in this struggle, and says: I will not let you go until you bless me. And God does bless Jacob. He gives him a new name, the name Israel which means He who strives with God. God reaffirms the covenant promises to Jacob. God has promised to be with him. He shows by His very presence that He is with Jacob. And he answered Jacob's prayers for deliverance from Esau.

But what matters to us today is what we can learn from this struggle about our lives with God. This text is more than just a nice story of what happened to one man in the past. The struggle of Jacob with God is really a struggle of prayer, your struggle and mine struggle, a struggle that we repeat time and time again. Are there not those times when we find ourselves like Jacob, in fear and agony as the cares and worries and pains of this world press in upon us? And we turn to God in prayer, but God seems so far removed from us. We call, but God does not answer.

We can choose to deal with this two ways. We can simply forget about God and try to deal with things on our own, or we can choose to be persistent, struggling with God, going to Him again and again; asking Him to help us. Like Jacob, we need to grab onto God, hold on to Him and say, I will not let you go until you bless me. This does not mean that we have to compel God to answer us by struggling against Him.

We do not have to wring our blessings out of Him. Although we often oppose Him by the actions of our lives, God is not our enemy. The one thing that makes us enemies of God is sin, and God has dealt with that sin by giving His own Son to die and to rise again for us so that we might be forgiven. And because Jesus Christ has done this for us God is our loving Father, who waits to bless us and to give us more than we ask. But sometimes the only way to the glorious end is through our struggles with God in prayer.

There is a story about a man who found a cocoon of the emperor moth and took it home to watch it emerge. One day, a small opening appeared, and for several hours the moth struggled but could not seem to force its body past a certain point. The man thought that something was wrong so he took scissors and snipped the remaining bit of cocoon. The moth emerged easily, its body large and swollen, its wings small and shriveled.

The man expected that in the next few hours the wings would spread out in their natural beauty, but they did not. Instead of developing into a creature free to fly, the moth spent its life dragging around a swollen body and shriveled wings. The constricting cocoon and the struggle necessary to pass

through the tiny opening are God's way of forcing fluid from the body into the wings. The "merciful" snip was, in reality, cruel and unnecessary.

Sometimes the struggle is exactly what we need. Sometimes God brings us into a struggle, because that is what we need in order to see the sin which separates us from Him. Sometimes the struggle helps us see our helplessness and leads us to focus on the power of God. Sometimes that struggle leads to greater blessings than we could imagine. If we give up, if we quit in the struggle, we lose it all. We are no better than the cocoon in the story. But through our persistence in the struggle, through our persistence in prayer, we gain the benefits and blessings that God has meant for us to have from the start.

When faith takes its stand on God's promises, it needs the same persistence we see in Jacob. This is the highest sacrifice, not to cease praying and seeking until we conquer Him. He has already surrendered Himself to us that we may be certain of victory, for He has bound Himself to His promises and pledged His faithfulness with an oath, saying in John 16:23 "Truly, truly, I say to you, if you ask anything of the Father, He will give it to you in My name." In Christ; God will be faithful to His promises. So be persistent, for you cannot lose with God. Amen. May God fill you all with great hope and joy in your believing. Amen