

## **FAITH WRESTLES WITH THE WORD**

Hear again the Word of God for this *Reminiscere* Sunday, as the Church in this place remembers the eternal mercy and steadfast love of the Lord:

*Then Jacob called (the) name of the place, Peniel, "For I have seen Elohim face – to – face yet (was) preserved, my life."<sup>1</sup>*

**Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ**

This Sunday in Lent, but not of Lent, is one given to remind the faithful that we are free to call out to God. Its name is derived from the opening word of the Introit Psalm antiphon (that which comes before the Psalm verse and after the Gloria Patri). Each year as the days lengthen, the 40-day Lenten fast is broken for the beginning of each new week. In the second of those break-fasts we are reminded that we may call out to God. The day's readings declare that to be particularly beneficial in times of trial caused by our own sins or sinful states. Each year, on this day, we publicly recall that we are free to cry to God on account of His revealed will in the sure and certain hope that He will remember His mercy and love for those whom He has named.

That thinking also applies when one is not troubled, but wishes to discern God's good and gracious will. Such is certainly apropos for this congregation at this time. Many of you have been participating in a renewed emphasis in discerning God's plans in your daily prayers. You, we, have added the daily petitions of the congregation's 96 days of prayer booklet to our devotional practices. We have cried out in hope that God will guide and guard us as we move forward to make decisions pleasing to Him. We wrestle with discerning God's designs for this congregation and community, as we remain called into one Body that continues to bear His Name. To assist us in that, God returns us to the weekly readings, and to the special weekday readings of His Church, that His Spirit might move us where He wills us to be.

Following the day's Introit's cries to remembrance, the readings continue to declare Lent II's truths into our ears. Among those is the divine reality that those who behold

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<sup>1</sup> Genesis 32:31.

their powerlessness to effect the good life changes and blessings they desire are moved by the Holy Spirit to turn to God. As they do so, they continue to struggle with His Word that He might bless them more abundantly than they could ever imagine for themselves.

From the historical narrative of Jacob's wrestling with God; through the Apostle's encouragement to continue in good as the faithful grapple with sins of passion; into the Canaanite woman's contending with the Son of God for His blessings, God's people hear and learn of Faith's response to all that threatens our bodies and lives. Each year, when you hear this week's Word of God, it is intended that in it you behold God your Savior. That means that you also must behold yourself as a sinner in need of saving. No room is left in the oral proclamation of this day's Word for you to find in it simplistic moral truths for living, psycho-healing magical wonders, or sentimental forms of godly emotionalism without recrimination for sin. (For you more theologically-word minded saints, such is called: moralistic - therapeutic - deism). Consider, the example given in our Old Covenant reading, and the interaction between Jacob and God. The Hebrew text properly begins:

*Then passed on, the present, before his face, and he (was) by himself in that night in camp.<sup>2</sup>*

Jacob is headed home, to the place where he had cheated his brother, Esau, of his birthright. He has been gone a long time, but the hurt he had given was deep. He had hoped to assuage his brother's anger by sending a present on to him. The present that passed on was very costly – hundreds of goats and sheep, tens of camels, cattle, and donkeys. Before that, Jacob had prayed to God to deliver him from his brother's vengeance. In doing that, Jacob had called out to God to remember God's promises to him. That night, he took whatever the Lord led into his hand, and accumulated and passed on the great gift just mentioned.

Have you ever been in a tight spot with someone, in terms of a debt you owed them for some wrong you have done them? Here we are not thinking of the taxes you

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<sup>2</sup> Genesis 32:22 MT

owe to the IRS on account of some fancy bookkeeping. We are recalling the time when you brought personal injury, harm or worldly woe to someone. In particular, such a time would have come when you were simply trying to help God fulfill His promises for you. Perhaps this thinking has happened at some point in your life: "God has promised to give me all I need for this body and life, and my (employer, grandparent, fill in the blank) has more than enough, so, if I do this (take my share now, or whatever) I can get these good things now." Such thinking comes from greed, as many of us heard during Wednesday's services.

That is what Jacob had acted upon, beginning with grabbing his brother's heel at birth. Later, with his mother's collusion, he continued fulfilling his greedy desires to fulfill God's promises for himself by stealing Esau's birthright from his blind and dying father. Such was the man who had trusted in God's promise that his descendants would be greater than the number of the sands on the seashore (Gen. 32:12).

Even so, through many years of testing and trial, Jacob had repented of his sins. He was a believer in God's promises, just like you. When the weight of his sin pressed in upon him, he determined to become reconciled with the person against whom he had so grievously sinned; just like you. Oh yes, he believed he was forgiven. Even so, the Faith, once turned to, produces works of repentance. Therefore, he sends on the flocks as recompense for the worldly damage he had inflicted upon his brother. Jacob was not hedging His bets, He was performing an act borne out of forgiveness. This shows a God-pleasing will to bring good to a party he had injured.

This is what you are free to do, you who have received God's forgiveness for your sins against others. You may go to them and present them with more than that which you had taken from them. Does this mean then, that you will be at peace as you approach them, as a God-forgiven sinner? Consider that which happened to a repentant, forgiven Jacob in our day's text, as the Word continues where the Greek Old Testament, and your English bulletin, translations begin:

*Then he rose in the night and he took his two wives and his two concubines and his eleven children and crossed the ford of the Jabbok, and he took them, and caused to send them across the stream, so he caused to send over that which was his.<sup>3</sup>*

Jacob had prayed to be delivered from evil, by calling upon God to remember His promises. He had sent repayment for injury ahead of himself. Then, in the Faith, he sent his family forward—not to protect himself, for the text declares, *and Jacob was left to himself* (Gen. 32:25a).

Many of you know what he was going through. You have been there—or you will be there. That is, alone in the quiet dark of the night, preparing to face one whom you have offended, having repented of your sins and worked to bring amends. It is then when the promises of God, contained in His Word, can bring you comfort, even while you wrestle with the consequences of your former actions. The Word continues,

*Then wrestled, (a) Man, with him unto the ascending of the black.<sup>4</sup>*

That literal translation paints a vivid, mental image of the occurrences of that night long ago. Jacob, alone in his thoughts, with the promises of the Word and the possible consequences of his earthly sins, struggles with a man. From the later parts of the narrative, we glean the truth that the Man was The Man. They wrestle until the black of night begins to lift.

That would be the time called, Beginning Morning Nautical Twilight. Colors cannot be discerned by the human eye at that time of day. Things, people, objects may only be viewed through peripheral vision. Off-center viewing may allow for some distinguishing of shapes, sizes, and outlines, but one cannot see clearly.

God, Who has revealed Himself to dwell in thick darkness and shadows, came to Jacob and grappled with him. Jacob fought back. As he did so, he gradually learned with Whom he was struggling.

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<sup>3</sup> Genesis 32: 23-24 MT

<sup>4</sup> Genesis 32: 25b

When the Creator in human form touched him, to bring to him an earthly lasting reminder that the wrestling was real and not just a dream, the Truth pierces Jacob's black thinking about the events to come when he was to meet his brother, Esau. The black of night lifts, Jacob, "the Grabber," discerns that the Word has physically come to him to wrest him from his doubts and to firmly secure him in God's promises.

Just so, does God such for you. He comes to you who have been named with His Name (naming is a big part of today's text), who have confessed your sins and willed to walk in new life, to touch you with His Real Presence. The veil of sin has been lifted from you. The Man, the Word, comes and brings that which seals you in His New Covenant promises.

As Jacob falls back with the struggle with the Word – and full trust in the Promise, the Word declares, *Let Me go, for the black ascends (Gen. 32:27a)*. Jacob, discerned Whom He was holding was unwilling to let go without receiving a blessing from Him.

Just so it may be with you! Perhaps there was a sin with which you had been struggling. You heard the Word of absolution. You know God has declared you not guilty. You believe His promise as He touches you with His very Body and Blood. Yet, you desire to cling to Him, to hold yourself in His Presence at His Table, until you hear His blessings again, "The very Body and Blood of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ strengthen and preserve you to life everlasting. Depart in peace." Yes, you, and all the faithful are like Jacob, clinging to the Word in the desire to hear His blessing. Oh, there is so much in this text and so little time left to us for it today....!

The Lenten Word continues as God gives to Jacob a new name. He had often grabbed for God's promises on his own. Now God declares him to be one who has, *striven with Elohim with men and have prevailed (Gen. 32:29b)*.

So also, is this true for you who are part of the New Israel. You are those who continue to strive with God and men, and in Christ, have prevailed. God has taken away your sins, and the punishment they deserve. He placed them upon the Word, the Man, Jesus the Christ. The bruising you deserve forever, and for all times, doubting God's

Word was laid upon Him. He bore it into death and the grave, that you might have a new name. That is the Name of our victorious Savior.

Jacob beheld a foreshadowing of that at that ascending of the black time long ago. We know that to be true, for he declared that which was chosen to be today's theme text. Jacob's response to wrestling with the Word of God, with receiving His blessing, is contained in these words,

*Then Jacob called (the) name of the place, Peniel, "For I have seen Elohim face – to – face yet (was) preserved, my life."<sup>5</sup>*

His confession is that of the faithful for all ages since. It is for you who have beheld God's veiled visage under Word, water, bread and wine. In places where God's Word is rightly divided showing sinners their sin and their Savior God is beheld. In locations where Christ's mysteries are celebrated according to His command and with His blessings, the Word is touched, tasted, and even so, wrestled with continually. That you continue to struggle with the Word, even as forgiven sinners, is proof to you that you are being saved. God has preserved your life in Christ, Whom you behold in simple means.

Someday, you will see Him clearly once the blackness of sin fully ascends from you and you dwell in the eternal Light of Life. Until then, you are free to remind Him, and therefore yourselves, of His mercy and steadfast love for those who continue to bear the Name He has given them, has given you!

**The peace which passes all understanding guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus**

Lent II, *Reminiscere* (LSB One-year series)

Psalm 121; Introit, Psalm 25:1-2a (ant. 25:6, 2b, 22); Genesis 32:22-32; I Thessalonians 4:1-7; Matthew 15:21-28

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***Soli Deo Gloria***

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<sup>5</sup> Genesis 32:31.