



9th Sunday of Pentecost

2nd August 2020

The Most Memorable Sleepless Night

Genesis 32:22-31 | Psalm 17:1-7, 16 | Romans 9:1-8 | Matthew 14:13-21

"Then the man said, "Your name will no longer be Jacob, but Israel, because you have struggled with God and with humans and have overcome."

Genesis 32:28

Intro |

Have you ever had a sleepless night in which it felt like you were wrestling with something, and the more the night wanes on, the greater the struggle seems to become?

There is nothing like the long hours of night, when we are alone with our thoughts, our memories of past mistakes, words we should not have uttered, actions we wish we had never done, to cause us to wrestle the blankets

Slide 2 |

If Jacob were with us today, I'm sure he'd ask us to pull up a chair, and say,

"Well, I can top that, I once had the worst a sleepless night ever, one I'll never forget."

"It was the night before I was due to see my brother who I hadn't seen for more than 20 years. To say that we parted on difficult terms, would be an understatement"

Last week we read about what had occupied Jacob for 14 of those 20 years. Jacob's life had not been easy, his father-in-law Laban had made promises only to break them, time and time again.

Finally, however, Jacob was free, and his first move was to head home.

For most of us, our deepest experiences with God are preceded by a personal crisis. Jacob is no different. His crisis can be summed up in two words: "unfinished business".

For 20 years he has lived with the memory of how he cheated his brother—not once, but twice. For 20 years he has wondered whether Esau still planned to kill

him. For 20 years he had dreamed of going home, but each time his dream became a nightmare – because of ... Esau.

Several days earlier Jacob had sent messengers to Esau with a message of peace and reconciliation. When the messengers returned, however, they brought an ominous report: *"We went to meet your brother Esau, and now he is coming to meet you, and four hundred men are with him."* (32:6)

It doesn't sound very promising. Maybe Esau had decided to get even after all these years. Maybe the 400 men were armed killers. Maybe he was planning a little massacre to settle an old score with his brother. (It would make a great movie – I can hear the trailer "The cheating scoundrel confronts his vengeful brother – what unfolds will keep you on the edge of your seat").

Unfinished business. Most of us know all about that. Maybe it's a broken relationship you thought time would heal. Maybe it's an unkind word hastily spoken which you had hoped, if you ducked low enough and long enough, would be forgotten.

But although time heals all flesh wounds, time never seems to heal the wounds made on a deep level.

Sooner or later you've got to go back and face your unfinished business.

That was why Jacob couldn't sleep.

"During the night Jacob ... [sent his family and all his possessions] ... across the stream and was left alone in the camp." (Genesis 32:22-23)

No wonder Jacob was frightened.

He is alone. No wife to get up and make him a cup of herbal tea.

God has, at last, got Jacob exactly where he wants him. Now God is ready to speak with Jacob.

Slide 3 | Point 1 | When God encounters us he will often cause us to confront our past mistakes

"A man wrestled with him till daybreak. When the man saw that he could not overpower him, he touched the socket of Jacob's hip so that his hip was wrenched as he wrestled with the man." (Genesis 32:24b-25)

Picture this bizarre scene. Jacob is thinking about the next day. He's watching the stars overhead. When a man suddenly appears before him. Who is he? Jacob doesn't know and the man doesn't identify himself. Suddenly the man grabs Jacob and begins to wrestle him to the ground. Jacob fights back desperately, thinking it might be a bandit or possibly an assassin sent by Esau.

On and on the men wrestle—grabbing, struggling, rolling around in the dust, each aiming to pin down the other. They do not talk to each other. Jacob is battling for his life. The other man—whoever he is and where he is from—remains a mystery.

Hours pass as neither can gain an advantage. Jacob is exhausted but dares not stop or show any sign of weakness. What time is it? One o'clock passes, then two o'clock, then three o'clock, then four o'clock. Sunrise is not far away.

Just as the first rays of light are streaking over the hills, the mystery man reaches out and touches Jacob's thigh, dislocating it immediately.

Just a touch, and Jacob feels his thigh bone pull out of its socket. Shocking pain pierces the largest and strongest muscle only to be replaced by weakness and vulnerability.

The sun is rising and the mysterious assailant needs to leave. But before he goes, he and Jacob have a brief conversation—the first words that have passed between them. In this conversation, we discover three things God brings about when he encounters us.

Slide 4 | Point 2 | An encounter with God brings new resolve and hope for the future

"The man said, 'Let me go for it is daybreak,' But Jacob replied, 'I will not let you go unless you bless me.'" (v26)

That's a new resolve. Up until this point in Jacob's life, he used all his strength and ability to achieve his own ends. For the first time, he's come to the end of his own resources. Now he realizes that without God, he's nothing.

So, he is determined that this man will bless him. Somewhere during the long hours of fruitless wrestling, Jacob came to the realisation that this "man" was no mere man. He was really the "Angel of the Lord" or "God as a man". He realised that he is wrestling with God himself. But Jacob is not letting go, he's holding on for dear life. If he can't win the fight, he's not going to give up until he gets a blessing.

From this point on he regards himself in a new way. He has hope for the future.

Slide 5 | Point 3 | An encounter with God brings a new identity

"The man asked him, 'What is your name?' 'Jacob,' he answered." (v27)

This was the turning point, the crucial moment, the breaking point of Jacob's life. Why did the man ask his name? He was asking Jacob "do you know who you really are?"

The name "Jacob" sounds like the Hebrew word "heel" and "deceiver." Up to that point, he was "Jacob, the deceiver."

God was asking "Are you ready to admit who you really are? Are you ready to confess the deep truth about yourself?"

That's hard for all of us to do - most of us will do anything to avoid confronting the hard truth about ourselves. If you are willing to confront the hard truth about who you really are, then Jesus can begin the process of setting you free (see John 8:32, 36).

"Then the man said, 'Your name will no longer be Jacob, but Israel, because you have struggled with God and with men and have overcome.'" (v28)

The Hebrew text contains a fascinating word-play. The word "Israel" literally means "God who prevails with man." It is not that Jacob struggled with God and won, but God struggled with Jacob and won.

Who won the match that night? God. Who lost? Jacob. But who really won? Jacob! That's the paradox of life. When we wrestle with God, we always lose. But when we lose, we win! Did not Jesus say something very similar?

"Whoever wants to save his life will lose it." (Mark 8:35)

"Whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant." (Mt 20:26)

In God's economy, the values of the world are completely reversed. The way up is down and the way to save your life is to lose it. Strangely enough, when you wrestle with God, defeat leads on to victory and the awareness of weakness leads to a new understanding of strength.

So what does "Israel" mean? It really has a double meaning and carries a double message. God is continually bringing all of us to a place where we will surrender our will to him. But in that act of surrender we obtain the only victory that really matters. In losing, we win!

Slide 6 | Point 4 | An encounter with God brings a new blessing

"Jacob said, 'Please tell me your name.' But he replied, 'Why do you ask my name?' Then he blessed him there." (v29)

The blessing meant that from now on Jacob would be known by a new name. No longer would he be known as a cheater and deceiver. From now on he would be remembered as the 'man who saw God face-to-face and lived' (v30).

Let's put it all together. In the great wrestling match of his life, Jacob lost. But in losing, he won! When that long night was over, Jacob knew something he hadn't know before. He now knows that God knows him through and through, and is willing to work with him *with* his weaknesses.

What a revolutionary discovery that is for all of us. When we realize that God sees right through our masks ... and yet loves us anyway, that truth will change your life forever. He's willing to take you right where you are.

Slide 7 | Application | In surrendering our weakness to God, he replaces our weakness with his strength

Here's a crucial insight: Although Jacob limped for the rest of his life, he learned that great strength comes out of great weakness.

The Apostle Paul learnt the same lesson. To prevent him from becoming prideful, a messenger of Satan was permitted to torment him. He recalls,

"Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness. "Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong." (2 Corinthians 12:8-10)

If you feel like you are limping today, you have nothing to apologize for. The greatest saints have limped through life, struggling to follow Jesus. You're not a victim, you're a trophy of God's grace.

You're not a victim, if you've been deeply hurt. Out of that hurt God can bring wonderful healing in your life.

What seems today like humiliating defeat, in the hands of God will be transformed into a glorious victory.

*Father, our greatest need is to believe that from defeat you can bring forth victory. We know it is true, yet many of us have our doubts. We know that you can take the wounds of this life and transform them by your grace. Do it, Lord. Touch us with your transforming power. Help us to embrace the cross of Christ, to pick it up and to follow after our Lord, limping as we go. **Amen.***

Reflection Questions:

With what are you wrestling with, at the moment? Is there a worry that you need to give to God and allow him to work through your weakness, so he can show you His strength?

Are you trying to do something in your own strength, which only God can do? Surrender, in prayer, your inability and rest on God's strength to transform your situation – for His glory.

DAY 6	I hear the call to worship	8th August
<i>Happy are those who hear the joyful call to worship, for they will walk in the light of your presence, Lord! Psalm 89:15</i>		Further study: Psalm 89
<p>“ <i>I will sing of the Lord's unfailing love forever! Young and old will hear of your faithfulness.</i> ”</p> <p>Psalm 89:1</p>	<p>The next verse continues “They rejoice all day long in your wonderful reputation. They exult in your righteousness.” In Biblical times, an alarm would sound signalling everyone that it was time to worship the Lord. We don't have such alarms now. So, it is all the more important for us to discipline ourselves to dedicate a portion of our time to worship the Lord. God's promise? The result will be we will walk in God's presence.</p> <p>Questions: Worship doesn't just involve coming to church. How can you include worship in your daily activities?</p>	
<p><i>Heavenly Father, thank you for calling me to live in continual worship of you. May I bring to remembrance your worthiness and honour, so I never stop praising your name. Amen.</i></p>	<p>Application: As you're going about your daily chores today, bring to mind your favourite verse and say it over and over to yourself.</p>	



This is a devotional resource created for Southlakes Anglican Church community.

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Week 2: I feel so powerless – I'm in need of God's strength

DAY 1	Remembering God our rock	3rd August
<i>Then they remembered that God was their rock, and the Most High God their Redeemer. Psalm 78:35</i>		Further study: Philippians 4:19

“
God led his people like a flock of sheep guiding them safely through the wildness.
”

Psalm 78:52

When you read the rest of this psalm you will discover that it recalls Israel's grave disobedience in the desert when they failed to trust in God's ability to care for them, and supply their needs. Although God had performed amazing miracles and wondrous signs, they quickly forgot God's ability when the arid wilderness was before their eyes.

Questions: In what way can you describe God as your rock? In what sense does God bring you refreshment, even in the wilderness? Can you recall a time where God provided for you? Thank him for these times.

Heavenly Father, thank you that you are my rock, in whom I can trust even when I am in a wilderness or my needs are so apparent. Thank you for continuing to care for me. Amen.

Application: In your prayer journal, jot down all the times in the past where God has looked after you, or provided for you. Use this time in prayer to thank God for his providential care of you and your family.

DAY 2	Turn my face toward my God	4th August
<i>Turn us again to yourself, O God. Make your face shine down upon us. Only then will we be saved. Psalm 80:3, 7, 19</i>		Further study: Romans 15:13
<p>“ <i>If my people will humble themselves and pray, I will forgive their sin and turn and heal their land.</i> ”</p> <p>2 Chronicles 7:14</p>	<p>Again and again throughout this Psalm, God’s promise of blessing is recalled, if only his people would turn to him with their whole heart. It is interesting that this psalm is written as a prayer, asking God to turn the hearts of his people back towards him. What a worthy prayer! Only God is able to awaken the hearts of people.</p>	
	<p>Questions: Who is someone that you know, whom you can pray for God to turn their heart toward him? Take some time to pray for God’s Spirit to do a work in their lives.</p>	
<i>Heavenly Father, thank you for the work of your Spirit in the world to turn the hearts of people toward you. Turn my heart toward you again. Amen.</i>	Application: God’s Spirit is in the world accomplishing God’s mission. But he has placed you in your neighbourhood and he longs to partner with you. Meditate on this.	

DAY 4	Praise our God of justice	6th August
<i>Let them praise your great and awesome name. Your name is Holy. Psalm 99:3</i>		Further study: Psalm 17:6
<p>“ <i>God places the lonely in families; he sets the prisoners free and gives them joy.</i> ”</p> <p>Psalm 68:6</p>	<p>There are so many Scriptures encouraging us to continually praise God for all his goodness in our lives. Again in this psalm we are reminded to always be praising God for He is holy and He rules with justice and fairness. How awesome it is that our God is mindful of those who are vulnerable and in need of justice.</p>	
	<p>Questions: Is there an area of your life in which you feel you are in need of justice? Ask God to act on your behalf in that situation.</p>	
<i>Heavenly Father, thank you that you are a God who acts justly and with fairness. May your praise be continually on my lips. Amen.</i>	Application: God wants us to be involved in advocating for justice for all people. Is there an issue that you are aware of, which you could bring before the Lord in prayer?	

DAY 3	The Joy of the Lord is my strength	5th August
<i>What joy for those whose strength comes from the Lord who have set their minds on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem. Psalm 84:5</i>		Further study: Exodus 14:14
<p>“ <i>Do not be dejected and sad, for the joy of the Lord is your strength.</i> ”</p> <p>Nehemiah 8:10</p>	<p>How wonderful it is that we can still go on a pilgrimage – even during COVID! No, it is not a pilgrimage to Jerusalem – it is a pilgrimage of drawing closer and closer to God, drawing on his strength for each new day. In today’s verse we learn that there is great joy when we draw on God’s strength, rather than try to find strength in the things of the world. It is easy to become distracted with many things, when what’s needed is to set our minds on the pilgrimage toward knowing God.</p>	
	<p>Questions: Read verse 6 of Psalm 84. When have you walked through the ‘valley of weeping’ and God has made it a place of refreshing springs?</p>	
<i>Heavenly Father, thank you although we go through times in which we feel like we are sinking into bottomless depths, you are faithful to answer our prayers and set us on steady ground. Amen.</i>	Application: In Nehemiah 8:10 we read “do not grieve for the joy of the Lord is your strength.” Meditate on this verse. How do you find joy in the Lord? What brings joy and refreshment to your life? Ensure you’re doing these regularly.	

DAY 5	What fills your mouth?	7th August
<i>Satisfy us each morning with your unfailing love, so we may sing for joy to the end of our lives. Psalm 90:14</i>		Further study: Psalm 118
<p>“ <i>Let all that I am praise the Lord; with my own heart, I will praise his holy name.</i> ”</p> <p>Psalm 103:1</p>	<p>If we flip this verse around, we could say that if we sing for joy until the end of our lives, we would be satisfied each morning with God’s unfailing love – do you see the connection? The habit of daily coming to the Lord and drawing on His love and joy is what brings satisfaction and contentment. There are so many things in the world that promise satisfaction. Yet, each one fails in the end to bring eternal contentment.</p>	
	<p>Questions: What is your heart longing for? How often do you ‘sing for joy’? Is there a particular Gospel song that you can softly hum to yourself, drawing on God’s joy and strength as you go about your daily business?</p>	
<i>Heavenly Father, thank you for the music artists who write heavenly songs which fill my heart with joy as I sing to you on a regular basis. Amen.</i>	Application: What is your favourite Gospel or Bible hymn? When was the last time you sang its melody, purely to build your spirit and encourage your heart?	

