

St. Luke Ev. Lutheran Church-WELS
Sermon by Pastor Anthony E. Schultz
October 24, 2010. Pentecost 22
Genesis 32:22-30



That night Jacob got up and took his two wives, his two maidservants and his eleven sons and crossed the ford of the Jabbok. After he had sent them across the stream, he sent over all his possessions. So Jacob was left alone, and 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. Then the man said, "Let me go for it is daybreak." But Jacob replied, "I will not let you go unless you bless me." The man asked him, "What is your name?" "Jacob," he answered. 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." Jacob said, "Please tell me your name." But he replied, "Why do you ask my name?" Then he blessed him there. So Jacob called the place Peniel, saying, "It is because I saw God face to face, and yet my life was spared."

People of God – rescued from the flaming lake of fire in hell by the innocent blood of the very Lamb of God:

When I was in high school – the toughest teacher we had was a man named Mr. Grubbs. He wasn't a very big man – but he was very powerful. Mr. Grubbs was the wrestling coach. He had arms that were like they had steel cords. Mr. Grubbs used to do gymnastics – the rings – those wooden rings – hanging from straps from the ceiling of the gym. Mr. Grubbs would put that chalk dust on his hands – jump up – grab those rings – pull himself up – then upside down – pushing his arms out – to make this thing called an iron cross – upside down – and nothing moved! That's strong. Mr. Grubbs was one of our gym teachers. When we had track in the Spring – we would run around the cinder track. Some of our teachers would be in little golf carts – in the infield of the track – with clip boards – yelling at us to run faster. Mr. Grubbs would be on the track – running backwards – yelling at us – "Hey, you guys, run faster!" Hours later – you would walk past open school doors. You would see a new class of guys running around the track – as fast as they could. Mr. Grubbs still running backwards – yelling at them. "Hey, you guys, run faster!" The wrestling coach – pound for pound – the toughest man I ever knew! But what he was, physically, Jacob was spiritually. Jacob was wrestling with his faith, his soul. And he wrestled through the night – wrestling a blessing from God. I don't think it's too often that you hear a sermon from near the end of the book of Genesis. But today we will be encouraged to:

Wrestle In Prayer

- 1. God is our strength**
- 2. God gives us blessings**

The book of **Genesis** is about beginnings – the beginning of the World – the beginning of people. It's about the beginning of sin and all its bitter consequences. It's about the promise of a Savior – to buy us back from sin and guilt! It was to a very special family of people that the LORD – the Great I AM – repeated his promise of a Savior – to be born of their family tree. It was by grace alone – that the LORD promised the Savior – to Father Abraham – then to his son

Isaac – and then to his son Jacob. It has been said – it’s very comforting to know – that Jesus is not ashamed to have people who are less than spiritual super-heroes as part of his family tree. Concerning Abraham, Isaac and Jacob – the writer to the Hebrews wrote, **¹³All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance. And they admitted that they were aliens and strangers on earth. ¹⁴People who say such things show that they are looking for a country of their own. ¹⁵If they had been thinking of the country they had left, they would have had opportunity to return. ¹⁶Instead, they were longing for a better country – a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them.** Hebrews 11. The focus of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob was Heaven – not earth. Their concern was not for the things and stuff of this world – but heavenly treasures. They longed for the day when their Savior would be born – to buy them back from sin and death. They would have given anything to be able to read **Matthew, Mark, Luke and John** – to see just how Jesus crushed the Serpent – to know about baptism and Lord’s Supper – about the Ten Commandments and the Lord’s Prayer – to be able to read **Romans** and **1st & 2nd Corinthians, Galatians** and **Ephesians**, to read the **Revelation to St. John**. How they longed to be able to read the Scriptures – that so many people have gathering dust on shelves in their bedrooms!

As always – it’s important to remember the historical context of the Scriptures we are concentrating on today. God’s Word – especially Old Testament history never happened in a vacuum. It’s essential to understand the surrounding circumstances. Jacob had not had an easy life. **²⁰ and Isaac was forty years old when he married Rebekah daughter of Bethuel the Aramean from Paddan Aram and sister of Laban the Aramean. ²¹ Isaac prayed to the LORD on behalf of his wife, because she was barren. The LORD answered his prayer, and his wife Rebekah became pregnant. ²² The babies jostled each other within her, and she said, "Why is this happening to me?" So she went to inquire of the LORD. ²³ The LORD said to her, "Two nations are in your womb, and two peoples from within you will be separated; one people will be stronger than the other, and the older will serve the younger." ²⁴ When the time came for her to give birth, there were twin boys in her womb. ²⁵ The first to come out was red, and his whole body was like a hairy garment; so they named him Esau. ²⁶ After this, his brother came out, with his hand grasping Esau's heel; so he was named Jacob. Isaac was sixty years old when Rebekah gave birth to them.**

Sometimes twins are just about identical. They look alike – think alike – act alike – enjoy telling family and friends – no, I’m the other person! Sometimes twins are like Jacob and Esau. Mom liked Jacob best. Dad liked Esau best. Dad liked Esau because he could hunt and fish. Esau was a manly man – shopping at Gander Mountain and Bass Pro-shop and ACE Hardware. Rebekah loved Jacob best. Jacob was content to stay at home – around the tent – visiting – talking and sharing! There is always a problem if children even think – even think – that there are favorites – one or the other loved more or less by one parent or both. You remember how Jacob stole the birthright – stole the double blessing from his aged father. Jacob with the help of his mom seasoned the goat meat to make it taste like venison – and with literally fur fastened to his arms – fooled father Isaac and stole the blessing. A blessing isn’t something you can take back – undo – or redo! When Esau found out what his twin brother had done he wasn’t just angry – he was filled with such a murderous rage – that he literally wanted to take his brother’s life. If Esau could get his hands on Jacob – he would put him to death! Do you know anger like that? Jacob literally ran for his life – ran as far as he could – as fast as he could – away from his homicidal brother. Remember Jacob’s ladder – Jacob sleeping, exhausted – with a stone for a pillow – seeing the staircase to Heaven – knowing that his Heavenly Father would be with him?

As we catch up with Jacob today – that was a long time ago – years ago. Now Jacob has two wives – Rachel and Leah – and children and a whole bunch of flocks and herds.

That night Jacob got up and took his two wives, his two maidservants and his eleven sons and crossed the ford of the Jabbok. After he had sent them across the stream, he sent over all his possessions. So Jacob was left alone, and a man wrestled with him till daybreak. It was time to meet Esau – after all this time. Jacob didn't know if his brother still hated him or not. So Jacob sent his twin brother gifts. God's Word says, ¹³ **He spent the night there, and from what he had with him he selected a gift for his brother Esau: ¹⁴ two hundred female goats and twenty male goats, two hundred ewes and twenty rams, ¹⁵ thirty female camels with their young, forty cows and ten bulls, and twenty female donkeys and ten male donkeys. ¹⁶ He put them in the care of his servants, each herd by itself, and said to his servants, "Go ahead of me, and keep some space between the herds."** The gifts were very generous. They came in waves – clumps and bunches of animals – that could have babies – the flocks growing and growing. Then Jacob split up his family – worst case scenario – one part was attacked – the other part could run for their lives and hopefully escape and be spared! At last – all alone – Jacob spent the night wrestling with God. The strength for this grappling – this wrestling – came from God. It was by grace and grace alone – that Jacob was able to wrestle with God. This was wrestling in prayer. It was a spiritual and emotional fight – as well as a physical fight – through the night. It was a test of endurance and stamina – to persevere! Do you know how that feels – to wrestle with God? Wrestle a blessing from the Gospel promises of God! Remember the Gospel promises of God? Philippians chapter 4--⁴**Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! ⁵Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. ⁶Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. ⁷And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."** Through the prophet Isaiah the LORD makes wonderful Gospel eternal promises! ¹⁹ **I will rejoice over Jerusalem and take delight in my people; the sound of weeping and of crying will be heard in it no more. ²⁰ "Never again will there be in it an infant who lives but a few days, or an old man who does not live out his years; he who dies at a hundred will be thought a mere youth; he who fails to reach a hundred will be considered accursed. ²¹ They will build houses and dwell in them; they will plant vineyards and eat their fruit. ²² No longer will they build houses and others live in them, or plant and others eat. For as the days of a tree, so will be the days of my people; my chosen ones will long enjoy the works of their hands. ²³ They will not toil in vain or bear children doomed to misfortune; for they will be a people blessed by the LORD, they and their descendants with them. ²⁴ Before they call I will answer; while they are still speaking I will hear. ²⁵ The wolf and the lamb will feed together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox, but dust will be the serpent's food. They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain," says the LORD. Isaiah 65 By the grace of God – we hold on to these Gospel promises – and won't let go until we have them. We hold on tight – because the LORD promised. He promised!**

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. (All it took was a touch – a mere touch – and Jacob's powerful thigh bone was all out of whack! His strength – just to hang on – was a gift of God's grace!) **Then the man said, "Let me go for it is daybreak." But Jacob replied, "I will not let you go unless you bless me." The man asked him, "What is your name?" "Jacob," he answered. 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."** Think about

that—struggled with God and with men and have overcome! All the glory belongs to the LORD—the God of free and faithful grace!

So Jacob called the place Peniel, saying, “It is because I saw God face to face, and yet my life was spared.” There is nothing more personal than your face—your eyes—the window to your soul. Your nose—your mouth—your ears—your face is what people think of—when they think of you. There is a man from Texas who was horribly burned—while painting a church. He was in a bucket—high above the ground—when he hit a power line—and was horribly burned. He was 3 months in a coma. He underwent countless surgeries—taking muscles and skin from other parts of his body to replace the muscles and skin of his face. He has no eyebrows. Is that a big deal? It kind of is! You can tell a lot about people’s feelings—even from here to the back pew or even the balcony—by their eyebrows! When eyebrows come together—then down—that’s seldom a good sign. I have seen usher and organist eyebrows—that signal good news and bad news! Think about it! If you are on a date—or talking to your spouse—or your teacher is talking to you—or you are looking at a whole group of people—watch their eyebrows! This man from Texas—has no eyebrows—he cannot see. He has no nose. That means he can’t smell. That’s hard, too! Think of all the wonderful smells in the world! The smell of fresh brewed Highlander Grogg—the smell of bacon with your eggs and fresh squeezed orange juice. The smell of pumpkin pie—of French vanilla hand lotion and Old Spice—on your face—when you have just shaved. He has no feeling in his face—when someone kisses him on the cheek or the morning sun shines on him—no lips—no teeth. And yet his attitude—not one of grim determination but actually one of joy! Imagine that! An attitude of joy—of thankfulness and thanksgiving—that his life was spared! An optimism—that he will receive a face transplant! Jacob had an attitude of joy and thanksgiving—**that he had seen God face to face and his life was spared!** We can face the future—no matter how difficult our circumstances might be—because one day we too will see our Savior face to face—safe at home forever. Amen!

