

Grace, mercy, and peace be unto you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.
Amen

Wrestling is quite a sport.

- I don't think many people understand it or how the scoring goes.
- If they did, I think it would be a much more popular sport.
- It is very grueling and difficult.
- It takes a lot of stamina and strategy.

Sandy and my youngest son was a wrestler.

- We gained a great appreciation for the sport.
- If you yourself have ever wrestled or had someone in wrestling, you know what I mean.
- If you have ever tried wrestling, even in a P.E. class in school.....wrestle for 2 minutes and you can be completely worn out.

Now mind you I am not talking about the WWF or whatever that is and the Friday night smack down and all that stuff on television.

- I am talking about real wrestling.
- Like happens at the grade school, high school and college levels and even in the Olympics.

Our Old Testament reading for today, which does form the basis for our meditation here this morning, is quite a peculiar passage.

- It is all about a wrestling match between God and Jacob.
- And it lasts all night long.

Similar to the sport of wrestling in general, I don't think it is a very well understood passage and may even leave you asking what does this have to do with me?

- I would argue that what is laid out for us this morning.....does tell us much and have great application for each of our lives.
- In fact, I would argue each of us have been, and will be, in wrestling matches with God also.
- As we continue on, I hope and trust that this will become clear to you.

Jacob is the one in our account who wrestles God. I think you know Jacob.

- Jacob was a twin with Esau.
- Son of Rebekah and Isaac.

Jacob was a man locked in mortal combat with his brother Esau from birth.

- You remember, at birth Esau was born first.
- That was very important. The first born got the birthright and 2/3rds of the inheritance.
- Jacob, as they were coming out of their mother's womb, held on to his brother's heel.
- And was given the name "Jacob" which means "heel grabber" or "supplanter."

And as they grew, Jacob was a man who knew how to prey on human weakness.

- When his brother Esau was famished Jacob would use food to steal the birthright.
- Remember Esau had come back from hunting and was extremely hungry.
- Jacob had made soup and would only give him some if Esau gave him his birthright which he did.

And when his father, their father, was nearly blind, Jacob would cover himself with animal skin and crawl into the darkness of that tent and prey on his father, Isaac's weakness.

- Stealing Esau's name in order to steal Esau's blessing.

And, of course, Esau did not take too well to all this.

- And Esau said, "After my father dies, I will kill my brother."

And Jacob fled to his uncle Laban to the north.

- And even there, while actually being deceived by Laban, Jacob also deceived Laban, his uncle to gain many possessions including herds of livestock.

And now we are coming to the situation Jacob faces in our Old Testament reading for today.

- Jacob has left Hebron, where his uncle Laban lived, along with his wives and maidservants and children and all his possessions.....
- And is heading back to the Promised Land. To the land he left to flee from his brother.
- Isaac and Rebekah have both been called home to their eternal rest.

But now Jacob has a problem.

- Esau is still there in the land to where he is returning.
- And we remember what Esau had vowed to do. Kill Jacob when his father was gone.
- And what now, is going to happen?

Jacob sends messengers ahead of him to Esau.

- And the word he gets back from the messengers?
- Esau is coming to meet you and 400 men are with him!
- Uh-oh!!

So you remember, Jacob devised a plan.

- He divided the people and the livestock into 2 groups.
- His logic was that if Esau attacks one group, the group that is left may escape.

The next day, Jacob sent gifts to Esau to attempt to pacify him.

- And that now brings us exactly to the point where our Old Testament reading begins today.

Jacob still had his family and his immediate possessions with him.

- And we are told Jacob sent his family and all that he had with him across the Jabbok River.
- The Jabbok was a tributary into the Jordan River.

And Jacob now is left alone

- And Jacob there, left alone, probably staring at the river, is in prayer to God and is wondering what tomorrow will be.
- And he suddenly.....as if smacked in the back.....without notice and by surprise.....is in a wrestling match.

A wrestling match that we later find out is with God.

- And we are told this went on until the breaking of day.
- All night long!

And we are also told that when God did not prevail with Jacob.....

- God touched Jacob's hip socket and Jacob's hip was put out of joint.

And all Jacob could do now was hang on and not let go.

- In fact, Jacob said, "I will not let you go until you bless me and tell me your name."

And then we are told that God did not tell Jacob His name; but gave Jacob a new name.

- He said, you will no longer be called Jacob, but Israel.
- Israel which means, "one who prevails with God."

For in the midst of all this we are told, what seems like an out of place, even more peculiar part of a peculiar story.....

- Jacob prevailed with God.

What?

- Jacob prevailed with God?
- The God we love and trust for our eternal life?
- Jacob, the deceiver, the one who preyed on human weakness, prevailed with God?

What does this all have to do with us? This is getting even more strange. Where does that leave us?

- Right where we should be and God wants us to be.

I said we can apply this account to our lives also.

- Please stay with me.
- I will bring this all together for us, and it will all make sense and you will be strengthened.

Each of us, at various times and ways, have wrestled with God.

- And just like Jacob, it is almost as if we are blind sided.
- We don't see it coming. We don't get to choose the time or the place.

It is God who decides when He is going to jump you and where He is going to jump you.

- Maybe it is a sudden illness.
- Maybe it is the death of a friend or family member.
- Maybe it is a temptation you face.
- Maybe it is a desire to turn to the world and be unfaithful.
- Maybe it is the ways of God you do not understand.
- Maybe it is something that didn't work out the way you wanted it to.

Maybe it is an addiction.

- I went over this account at the prison this week with one of the inmates.
- And he immediately identified and related all this to a drug addiction he had when he became incarcerated.

We all have wrestled with God and let me tell you.....

- We will each wrestle again with God and we don't know when it is coming.
- And it usually doesn't fit our schedule or preferences.

But you will wrestle with God.

- And it will be a consuming quest by you for a blessing and for you to know God and for you to be sure God knows you.

And we said in our Old Testament account.....Jacob prevailed.

- And that is the way our God works.
- God was actually delighted to hear Jacob answer, "I will not let go unless You bless me."

God didn't want Jacob, and He doesn't want us to let go.

- He delights to let us win victories over Him on the basis of humble, believing prayer.
- To not let go, to hang on to God no matter what and no matter how long it has been.

Do you remember as a child, your parent or grandparent letting you beat them at something.

- Maybe some of you do that now with little ones.
- You are delighted when they win.
- On a much, much bigger scale with God, that is how it happens with Jacob and it happens with us.
- Jacob would not let go until God blessed him.

And Jacob asked Him His name.

- But for this God did not answer.
- He remained silent.

And is that also how it is for us many times when we wrestle with God?

- Go to any of our hospitals.....Gateway, Anderson, Barnes, St Louis University.....you pick it.
- And there are people wrestling with God for a blessing.
- And they ask why? And there is no answer.

Or, one of you, for good reason are hurting.

- You come into the pastor's office, and sit down.
- You're wrestling with God for a blessing.

- And you ask for an answer.

And there doesn't seem to be one.

- Your heart aches. You want an answer.
- Your pastor's heart breaks also.....because God is silent with him as well.
- And he says, "Let God be God."

And so you cry, and the pastor tries to hide that he is crying also, and your mind races for answers.....but you don't let go of God.

- You have a consuming quest for a blessing and for you to know God and you to be sure God knows you by name.

In the end when Jacob did not let go.....

- In verse 29 of our Old Testament reading we are told, "And there He (God) blessed him."

And God acknowledged He knew Jacob by name.

- In fact, He changed his name to Israel, "One who prevails with God."

And God knows your name.

- At the baptismal font the question was asked, "And how is this child to be named."
- God knows your name.

And Jacob or Israel now, knew in the end it was God.

- Jacob or Israel grew in His relationship with God.
- Look at the last verse of our Scripture reading.
- We are told Jacob called the place, Peniel (puh Neal) which literally means "face of God."
- For Jacob, now Israel said, "I have seen God face to face and yet my life has been delivered."

Wrestling is tough.

- It is exhausting.
- And just like Jacob you are left wounded.
- Psychological wounds or physical wounds or both.

Jacob's hip was put out of joint.

- Can you imagine the limp Jacob or Israel had when he walked away?
- Can you imagine the limp Jacob had the rest of his life?

But in the end, Jacob, or you and I would not want it any other way.

- It is not enjoyable but it is good.
- It sanctifies you.
- It allows you to identify your wounds with the wounds of Christ.

Dear Christian friends.....

- We are in a spiritual and physical quest.
- We have the limp.
- The cross.
- The wounds.
- The scars to show for it.
- Both psychological and physical.

Maybe you are in a wrestling match right now.

- Sooner or later we will each be in them.
- Like Jacob, we don't pick the times.
- But we hang on to God.

And the dawn will come.

- And we will be blessed.
- And you will understand more and more what your name really means and your relationship with Christ.

And would there be any of us who would choose anything else over being so blessed and found in Jesus.

- God grant this for Jesus' sake.
- Amen.

(Please stand) And now, may the peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

Having heard the Word of God we now prepare our hearts and minds to confess together the words of the Nicene Creed as found on page 206 in your hymnal.