

# Sunday closest to October 19

Proper 24

Year C

RCL

Genesis 32:22-31

Psalm 121

2 Timothy 3:14-4:5

Luke 18:1-8

Sometimes, being in relationship with the holy can be quite a mysterious thing. Like any relationship we enter into, we seek to know what values and passions the other person has, and we invite them to know ours. We might ask ourselves, in what ways do we connect or what defines our relationship together? For the relationship with the Holy, we're invited into something life giving and all encompassing, and we find that relationship through many avenues. We use terms like faith and hope, seeking and persevering when we engage with God. And we spend our spiritual lives walking among those terms, figuring out what faith in the Living God truly means.

Scripture draws us into that relationship time and time again, and sometimes, it does this in what we might describe as bizarre encounters. The reading from Genesis reminds us how God enters into our lives and how we interact with the sacred. And these encounters in scripture, even the strange

ones, are important because they are a part of our story, of our history and of our spiritual ancestors. For us to engage in Jacob's story, we might ask ourselves, what's going on in this bit and how is Jacob wrestling with a spiritual being relevant to our walks in faith today?

When we find Jacob at the River Jabbok, he's about middle aged. He's had quite a life. He is the son of Isaac and Rebecca. As Isaac is dying, Jacob takes the birthright blessing and inheritance from his twin brother Esau. Fleeing from the anger of his brother, Jacob has a dream about a ladder, with angels coming up and down, hearing God's voice. After this dream, he continues on his journey and ends up working for seven years for Laban for Rachel's hand in marriage. When the deceit is turned upon him, he marries Rachel's sister Leah and Jacob stays another seven years for Rachel. After having 12 children between them, Jacob sought to return home.

This is where we find Jacob today, on that journey, almost home. Before he could complete his final steps, Jacob received word from messengers that his brother Esau would meet him with 400 men, and Jacob began to prepare himself for seeing his brother again. So he sent his family across the River Jabbok. Jacob was left alone, but not for long. A man appeared, seemingly out of nowhere. And Jacob and this man wrestled. And they wrestled for quite some

time, from dark to dawn. Sensing dawn was coming, the man revealed himself to be an agent of God and said that they must resolve this struggle before Jacob could see God's face. Jacob seeks a blessing and is blessed by receiving a new name, Israel, in this reconciliation.

Jacob's life seemed to be one of struggle. He made some bad choices against humans and God. But he didn't stop. Jacob kept on going, kept on persevering throughout it all, and desired to return home again. Through it all, we're shown brief glimpses of his relationship with God- which Jacob never let go of. His experiences, though, tell more about the nature of God and having faith in God than it does about him.

God continues to stay by Jacob's side, just as God does us. It sometimes seems we have faith in a being that often appears out of nowhere, materializes beside us, like the man at the river. First we think it's something else, then we realize it's God among us. We can find ourselves fighting God's presence- not recognizing God within us- or not wanting to follow a sometimes difficult path we're being called to. So we wrestle and struggle with the sacred presence among us. Like Jacob, we've all contended with God at some point in our lives.

In faith, there is frustration, wondering, longing, and persevering after something that we can't often name. So, is that what we're supposed to learn

from Jacob? That the true nature of faith is struggle and perseverance?

Certainly, it can be part of our relationship with God. But it doesn't have to define it. To engage in the life of faith is not a passive existence, but an active one. -One that finds us in deep relationship and conversation with God. One that opens our eyes to see God seeking after us just when we think it's the other way around.

Are we led by that spirit or our wounds from past times? Maybe it's a little bit of both. When we don't sense God, how do we not lose heart? When we struggle with faith and prayer, in our lives with brokenness or other things that disappoint or depress us, it seems God is so far from us. But what we see in Jacob's experience, and it is true for us as well, is that God is right there with him. In very intimate ways.

When we think back to these intimate moments with God, we do not remain unchanged from these visitations. Like Jacob receiving a new name, we are inwardly altered. Dawn does come for Jacob, and after his wrestling with God, he goes to meet his brother Esau where he is reconciled. Maybe, hearing Jacob's story reminds you of God within during a difficult personal time. Or maybe it draws you out, giving you hope in these very uncertain times for our world. Or maybe you still think it's weird and you're not sure what to make of

it. Wherever you find yourself in this story, it is our story to be a part of. To remember what it reveals about God. The life of faith can be a difficult one, elusive and mysterious. Yet at the same time it is a fulfilling and satisfying one which shows us what we need to know. Helps us find what we are seeking.

What does a life of faith mean to you? In the times that you've struggled in faith, what has come out of it? In the times when you begin to lose heart, what or who do you draw on to find hope again?