

Scripture Reading:

Genesis 32:22–31

Read through this passage twice.
What one thing captures your attention

Background

Jacob, the protagonist in our story today, finds himself in a difficult position.

He has a reputation as a trickster – years earlier, he cheated his brother Esau out of his birthright, the blessing that rightfully belonged to the elder son. Now Jacob is returning home after years away. Word reaches him that Esau is coming to meet – with four hundred men.

Jacob prepares gifts, divides his family and flocks, and braces himself for the worst. But as night falls, he finds himself alone by the river Jabbok – wrestling not with his brother, but with his own heart.

Put yourself in Jacob's mind for a moment.

- How would you be feeling?
- What actions might you be thinking of taking?

Reflection

In the darkness, Jacob is visited by a mysterious stranger with whom he wrestles through the night. It's as if his whole life – his trickery, his guilt, his fear, his longing for blessing – comes to the surface in this struggle. He wrestles with his past and with God.

At dawn, wounded but transformed, Jacob receives a new name: Israel – “the one who strives with God.”

He limps away marked forever by grace.

Monologue : Jacob's Voice

To be read slowly, as a reflective piece

The night was thick with silence – only the river moving beside me. I sent everyone away: wives, children, servants, all my wealth. Alone at last – and I was terrified.

Esau's face haunted me. The brother I deceived. Would he come with a sword? Would he remember my lies?

I knelt to pray, but prayer turned to panic. Then – out of nowhere – a hand was on me. A stranger. No words. Just struggle.

We wrestled – body, soul, everything I had been running from. Was he a

man? An angel? My own conscience? Every move I made felt like fighting myself – my pride, my fear, my need to be right, my need to be blessed.

“Let me go!” he said as dawn broke. But I clung to him. “Not until you bless me.”

And in that moment, I realised: this was God – not destroying me, but holding me, naming me, wounding me into wholeness.

I limped into the sunrise – not the same man who crossed the river the night before. For I had seen God face to face... and somehow, I was still alive.

Wonderings

- I wonder where, like Jacob, you have met God without recognising it at first.
- I wonder what kind of “night wrestling” you have known – with fear, guilt, or faith itself. I wonder what blessing might be waiting within your struggle.

Two Personal Stories

Judith's Story

Judith wrestled with herself for years. A difficult upbringing left her uncertain of her worth. She drifted through jobs and relationships, numbing her pain with alcohol.

Then she found an AA group where she was accepted and understood. A friend there invited her to church, and slowly, a fragile faith began to grow. Her struggles didn't vanish, but she began to glimpse God's presence in the kindness of others. Her wrestling became holy ground – where grace took root.

Peter's Story

Peter, a lifelong believer, was shaken when his sister was diagnosed with terminal cancer. His prayers for healing turned to anger and silence. But in that silence, he found something new. He began to sit quietly with his sister, listening and laughing, rather than demanding answers from God. His wrestling brought no clear explanation – but it made him gentler, more compassionate. The struggle itself became a strange kind of blessing.

Shared Reflection

- Do either of these stories echo with your experience?
- Can you recall a time when your own inner struggles, with others, or with God, have become a place where grace was at work?
- I wonder who, in your life, might be saying to you, or hearing from you, “To see your face is like seeing the face of God.”

Beyond the Wrestling : The Next Morning

In Genesis 33, Jacob meets Esau at last. He goes expecting the worst – but Esau runs to meet him, embraces him, and forgives him. Jacob, humbled and changed, says to his brother: “To see your face is like seeing the face of God.” Their reconciliation becomes a picture of divine grace – the healing of a broken relationship through forgiveness and generosity.

Group Response

- Where in your community have you seen a story of reconciliation?
- Where have wounds brought wholeness?
- What thoughts or examples might you want to share with whoever is preaching or leading worship in your context on Sunday?

Closing Prayer

God of the struggle,
Just as Jacob wrestled through
the night,
we bring our own fears, wounds,
and questions before you.
Meet us in the struggle;
transform us
as you transformed him.
Change our hearts
and our purpose,
that we may walk
in the name you give us.

Let our struggles
draw us closer to you,
and our wounds
become signs of
blessing for others.
Through Christ our Lord.
Amen.

Final Thoughts

What examples might you share
with the people leading worship or
preaching at your church this Sunday?

- I wonder who, in your life, might be saying to you – or hearing from you – “to see your face is like seeing the face of God.”
- I wonder what kind of “night wrestling” you have known – with fear, guilt, or faith itself.
- I wonder where, like Jacob, you have met God without recognising it at first.
- I wonder what blessing might be waiting within your struggle.



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Paul Gauguin



HeartBeat

Wrestling in the Night

Sunday 19th of October

Lectionary Reading:
Genesis 32:22–31

Ice Breaker

Can you think of a story in the news recently about a fractured relationship – where one of the parties might be fearful of meeting the other? What feelings or hopes do such stories stir in you?

Opening Prayer

God of reconciliation,
You meet us in the challenges of
daily living.
Open our hearts to receive your
transforming forgiveness,
and so unlock the generosity you
have placed deep within us.
Amen.