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21st Sunday after Pentecost

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Gen. 32:22-31; Ps 121; Luke 18:1-8

Series C

Christ Lutheran Church

A little boy was kneeling beside his bed with his mother **and** grandmother and softly saying his prayers,

“Dear God, please bless Mummy, Daddy, Grandma & all the family and please give me a good night’s sleep.”

Suddenly he looked up and shouted, “And don’t forget to give me a bicycle for my birthday!!”

“There is no need to shout like that,” said his mother. “God isn’t deaf.”

“No,” whispered the little boy, “but Grandma is.” //

Prayer is the topic of our lessons today and Jesus parable reminds us that God indeed is not deaf!

It is about our need to pray always & not to lose heart. Jesus’ story is about a despicable judge

who neither feared God nor had respect for people. Not even for a widow – one which the law told him to

treat w/ special kindness, only after she badgers him, embarrasses him w/ her pleading, does he relent

The message of the parable mirrors Jesus’ earlier instructions about prayer in Luke:

“It you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children; how much more

will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!” (Lk. 11:13)

“If even the most unjust of judges will finally relent to the ceaseless petitions of a defenseless widow,

then much more will God – who is, after all, a good judge – answer your prayers!” //

Add to this command to “pray always and not lose heart” our OT story about Jacob’s wrestling match

And we have a unique and wonderful teaching on prayer and a new way to consider our own prayer lives.

Jacob is about to meet up with his brother Esau after 20 years apart. He is scared and unsure.

The last time they were together, Esau – the physically stronger brother - was fighting mad. Jacob tricked

him out of his birthright & stole his blessing fr their father Isaac! Jacob then turned tail & ran for his life!

(SL) Earlier in chap. 32, Jacob prayed for God’s deliverance & protection from his brother. Now alone in the night,

having sent his family across the river, a man appeared & wrestled w/ Jacob ‘til daybreak.

Jacob held on and even prevailed – refusing to let his mysterious wrestling partner go until he got a blessing.

The man was none other than God Himself and indeed he blessed Jacob and so much more too!

Yet, it is a ridiculous premise really – Jacob a man, prevailing in a wrestling match against God – PAGE 2

the Lord who made heaven and earth – God who could have squished Jacob like a bug in a nanosecond wrestling with him all night and not prevailing! //

Once there was a high school wrestling match between two Iowa high schools - Ogden and Humboldt.

Humboldt had a senior on their team with Down syndrome. While he was enthusiastic and spirited, he couldn't really challenge anyone on the Ogden team. But the Humboldt coaches asked if anyone on the Ogden team would at least give the boy a chance to get out on the mat.

An Ogden wrestler offered to take him on.

He not only wrestled him for the entire six minutes, but allowed his opponent to beat him on points.

He gave the Humboldt kid the thrill of not only competing, but of raising his arm in victory.

Both wrestlers got a standing ovation, and there was hardly a dry eye in the gymnasium. //

The unique message of the Bible is that our God is not an impersonal force, or a terrifying presence to whom

we cannot relate in any meaningful way. God is ready and willing and eager to get down

and dirty with us. To wrestle the night away – to even let us prevail – so that He can change us;

bless us; use us – even give us the victory we cannot earn or win on our own.

Jacob's story is a unique way to look at what it means to pray always and to not lose heart!

For indeed prayer is about more than asking for this or that – it is also, perhaps mainly

about our ongoing relationship with God and how He changes us, sticks by us and blesses us.

And so Jacob's story has first to do with confession and forgiveness. And this happens through Jacob's names –

old & new. God asked Jacob – “What is your name?” - now God surely knew!

Yet He wanted Jacob to speak it – admit it – confess it – And he answered: “Jacob.”

For you see, that name encompassed the truth of who and what Jacob had been –

Jacob literally means “heel” with the connotation of cheating.

Jacob - a cheater, one who lied to his blind father and stole his brother's blessing, one who had to run for his life

and go into exile, one who struggled for 20 years with his father-in-law Laban, deceiving and being deceived.

That name told the hard truth about who Jacob was.

PAGE 3

It was in a real sense spoken as confession – as the truth of his brokenness and sin.

Then God – said: “You shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel!” -

which means “to struggle with God and prevail!”

This new name is the truth of who Jacob is becoming, a new man, the father of a new nation.

Traces of the old Jacob will remain, but at this crucial turning point – God gives Jacob a new identity
and he is changed ever after and given the blessing of God and His promise of faithfulness forever!

Confession and forgiveness and blessing – for Jacob and for us - For we are the spiritual descendants

of Jacob. We are the people who wrestle with God – and prevail! It is not presumptuous of us

to make this claim. God was the One who gave that name to His people! That’s who God wants us to be!!

Jesus said: “Pray always & do not lose heart!!” Struggle & prevail!

When you pray – you wrestle with God – you hold on for dear life – for a blessing.

God could squish you like a bug in a nanosecond. But for your benefit, God is always available to wrestle
with you – to hear your confession – to change you more and more each day from sinner to saint,
from Jacob to Christian - to go with you to meet your fears and face your challenges.

Of course, as Christians we know this about God most clearly in Jesus – the one who told us today’s parable –
the One who encourages us to pray always and not lose heart – Jesus whom God sent into the world
to wrestle with us- Jesus who allowed himself to get pinned to a cross.

That’s what it took for God to drive home the point that although he is the Lord who made the heaven and earth –
He cares for us – He hears our prayers – He will quickly grant justice – He is in the struggle with us -

He even died for us – He does and will give victory – ours is but to remain faithful enough to keep asking.

But remember, it’s grandmas who give new bikes – God grants forgiveness, courage, understanding,

strength, blessing, help, new life – when we pray - God lets us hold on & even prevail –as He changes us
even knocks us out of joint sometimes! But God is not deaf! Keep the faith dear friends

– pray always and do not lose heart! AMEN