

Sermon for Pentecost 19c  
Proper 22c  
October 16, 2022  
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Los Alamos, New Mexico

[Genesis 32:22-31](#)

[Psalm 121](#)

[2 Timothy 3:14-4:5](#)

[Luke 18:1-8](#)

When I read the Scriptures for today, I was reminded of my very young years watching Championship Wrestling on our black and white TV. And I remembered the wrestlers – Dick the Bruiser, Bobo Brazil, Killer Kowalski, and others.

These were big guys, doing body slams, throwing each other across the ring – and out of it. Hitting each other with chairs. You name it, they did it. No matter how hard the beating, they were back the next week, going at it again.

I've never thought of Jacob as a big guy. Certainly no match for any of the muscle bound behemoths of early television. I always thought of him as slight, sneaky, a trickster – the second born son of Isaac who cheats his elder twin out of his birthright. A guy who runs away rather than facing his brother Esau.

But in the Genesis reading Jacob is anything but a coward. From the outcome, Jacob is able to hold fast and gets the name of Israel - one who has “striven with God and with humans and have prevailed.”

Now that's wrestling on a truly championship scale.

Another form of wrestling seems embedded in the Gospel reading today. Jesus tells his disciples this story to teach them they “need to pray always and not to lose heart.”

Jesus describes a judge “who neither feared God nor had respect for people.” Jesus further describes a widow, who has been unjustly treated in some unspecified way. She confronts the judge who apparently denies to assist her. Instead of giving up, she persists and will not leave the judge alone. She persists, and just to get her off his back, he relents – not out of any sense of conscience or fear of God, but just to end her pleadings.

Jesus tells the disciples to take heart, will not God who is just much more readily grant the requests of those who seek justice.

Like Jacob, we're all wrestling with God trying to do what's right or trying not to do what's wrong.

I know I pray for God to guide me, but as often than not I ignore what God has to add to my life, or try to rationalize what I want to do with what I know I shouldn't do. I wrestle. We all wrestle.

It seems like an endless cycle: like Sisyphus – condemned by the gods to an eternity of pushing a boulder up the mountain only to have it roll down again.

Not that Sisyphus is necessarily to be pitied. The ancient Greek character was the king of the city that was to become known as Corinth. He offended the gods by killing guests and breaking the laws of hospitality. He cheated death twice and condemned to the futile task for all eternity.

In Second Timothy, Paul, no stranger to Corinth, encourages his friend persevere: “proclaim the message; be persistent whether the time is favorable or unfavorable; convince, rebuke, and encourage, with the utmost patience in teaching.”

Paul tells Timothy to keep pushing the truth of the Scriptures just as we must keep living the life God has created us to live.

There are so many competing voices. Sometimes the choice is not what we are to do, but who we choose to listen to.

Paul warns Timothy: “the time is coming when people will not put up with sound doctrine, but having itching ears, they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own desires, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander away to myths.”

We need to pray that our choices are guided by the Holy Spirit. That means praying.

Jesus tells us to be unrelenting in prayer, like the widow.

I’ve always thought we were to identify with the widow, that this story was telling us that we should keep praying no matter how often we think our prayers aren’t answered, to keep asking and asking and asking, and never give up.

But thinking about it the past week, I realized that maybe we are really the judge.

Seems to me, given the timbre of our currently polarized political climate, people in general have no respect for God or other people.

As often as not we people ignore the pleas of those around us, and, as often as not, we ignore the pleas of God.

If we are to identify with the judge, it then God the widow, who has continually sent prophets and called us to do God’s will.

It even got to the point that God became human to talk to us face to face to convince us to build the kingdom.

And we killed him, and he rose again – like the story of Lazarus and the rich man says: “surely if you send someone back from the dead they will believe.” But we don’t.

And still God pleads with us to be kind to each other, to care for others, and to build the kingdom of heaven.

Like the widow, God keeps after us, wrestling in the night, asking us to do what we know we ought to do – to build the kingdom so that when “the Son of Man comes,” he will find “faith on earth”.

We need to be reassured, so please turn to page 4 in your bulletin, and read with me the words of assurance in Psalm 121.

- 1 I lift up my eyes to the hills; \*  
from where is my help to come?
- 2 My help comes from the Lord, \*  
the maker of heaven and earth.
- 3 He will not let your foot be moved \*  
and he who watches over you will not fall asleep.
- 4 Behold, he who keeps watch over Israel \*  
shall neither slumber nor sleep;
- 5 The Lord himself watches over you; \*  
the Lord is your shade at your right hand,
- 6 So that the sun shall not strike you by day, \*  
nor the moon by night.
- 7 The Lord shall preserve you from all evil; \*  
it is he who shall keep you safe.
- 8 The Lord shall watch over your going out and your coming in, \*  
from this time forth for evermore.

Amen.