

Sermon for the 19th Sunday after Pentecost
Proper 24c
October 19, 2025
The Rev. Canon Raymond Raney
Trinity on the Hill Episcopal Church
Los Alamos, New Mexico

Genesis 32:22-31
Psalm 121
2 Timothy 3:14-4:5
Luke 18:1-8

How many of you have done a Jacob?
You know ...
Spending the night rolling over and not going to sleep.
Thinking and Re-thinking
and trying to wrestle with issues of conflict, of conscience.
Working through issues and personalities.
Unable to let go of the day behind to be ready for the day ahead.

So, what do we do?
Keep trying to get to sleep?
Get up and chart out the problem?
Or turn on the TV or read a book
and try to put our mind somewhere else?

It's interesting that the turmoil of Jacob is left out of the reading today. What's not there: God tells Jacob to return to the land of his father and face his brother. Not an easy thing to do.

If you remember, Jacob had good reason to fear Esau.
After all, Jacob and his mother Rebekah conspired to steal Esau's birthright as the first born of Isaac.

Jacob had to run for his life
and ended up being tricked into working an extra seven years
to earn the hand of his beloved wife Rachel.

So here he is, getting ready to face his estranged brother,
hoping against hope
that he's not going to be killed by his brother and his hundreds of men.

To Jacob's credit, he has believed God's command,
as it said in the missing part of the reading,
that he return to the land of his origins.
Not that he doesn't have his doubts.

Maybe that's part of what he was wrestling with.

Do we trust God? Really, Ever? Or maybe – sometimes?
That trust can be exemplified in the word **persistence**.

Paul uses it in his letter to Timothy:
“be persistent whether the time is favorable or unfavorable.”

In this reading we see the needs and demands of the pastor,
but we also see the acknowledgement
that persistence is required at all times,
not just at the best of times or the worst of times, but at all times.

Luke's story of the parable of the persistent widow is the model for us, each of us, all of us, to be
persistent,
Particularly, be persistence in prayer,
which is the stated reason for the parable in the first place.

Pray, Pray unceasingly, Pray continually. Pray for everything.
Jesus tells us to keep wrestling. That's the message in today's Gospel.
The parable is introduced as the “need to pray always and not lose heart.”
It's such a short reading to be so seemingly clear.

The interpretation I've always heard
is that Jesus is describing a judge
who follows neither the laws of God or the laws of humans,
but who responds to persistence of the woman to get her out of his hair. The lesson, I've been told,
is that if this man will answer the petitions of the woman,
won't God, who cares, respond even more readily
to the persistent petitions of each of us.

I've always thought we were to identify with the widow,
and 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.
To keep wrestling with God just as Jacob refused to surrender.

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

Perhaps, God is 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 the beggar 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, like Jacob,
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”.
So what can we do?

We all are called to wrestle with God.
But where are we to meet God?

It’s likely not in some deep meditation or an out of body experience
in which we are floating through heavenly bliss.
More likely, we are called to meet God in the people around us.
God finds us in the eyes and hearts of the people we meet in relationship: Eye to Eye, Hand to
Hand, Face to Face.

All of us are our neighbors, and we are, each and every one of us,
not just called to love one another, but to be responsible for each other. We cannot be in
relationship with God
without being in relationship with the people around us, and, thereby, sharing responsibility for the
lives we lead in this life
and preparing for the glory awaiting us all in the life to come.

In his partial autobiography, *Surprised by Joy* C.S. Lewis maintained:

“There are no ordinary people.
I’ve never met a mere mortal.
Nations, cultures, civilizations, these are mortal.
Their life is to ours as that of a gnat.
It is immortals whom we joke with, work with, marry, snub, exploit.
The weight or burden of my neighbor’s glory
should be laid daily on my back.
A load so heavy, only humility can carry it.
And the backs of the proud will be broken.”¹

Amen.

¹ Quoted in C.S. Lewis: The Most Reluctant Convert
Written by Max McLean