

Sunday Scriptures: 2nd August 2020 Revd Janice Morgan

Genesis 32:22-32 *Jacob wrestles with God at Peniel*

²⁸Then the Man said, "You shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel, for you have striven with God and with humans, and have prevailed."

This is an ancient story that fulfils several roles: the reason for the place name, Peniel meaning, 'Face of God'; the reason for the dietary law of not eating the thigh muscle of any animal, and the reason for Jacob's name change to 'Israel', the point at which his individual life becomes a portrait of Israel's life as a nation. But here, Jacob has a troubled conscience; he began life as a cheat, a liar, a bully and a thief! Jacob had taken advantage of his older brother Esau, at a time of weakness and tricked him. He had cheated Esau out of his most precious possession, the inheritance of his birth-right. But his manipulated victory bore its consequences. Esau threatened to kill him for what he had done and Jacob had fled in fear of his life, his soul darkened with guilt, and a troubled conscience that denied him peace.

God has a way of dealing with our sin and ironically Jacob was made subject to the same treatment he had dished out. The cheater was cheated by his Uncle, Laban, into marrying the wrong woman, Leah. Laban manipulated Jacob into doing hard labour for fourteen years, in order to marry the promised Rachel. Despite his Uncle's scheming, Jacob had served him with integrity and God had blessed him with riches. Finally, he had to flee for his life, yet again, as a result of his cousin's jealous anger when their father's schemes were thwarted by God. *How often do we cheat?* My Dad always said a cheat only cheats themselves because they know their victory is a lie.

Jacob was now about to meet his brother, Esau, for the first time since that day. Talk about finding yourself between a rock and a hard place! Jacob was frantic with fear, he could not go back or forward without facing the threat of death! Instead of giving in to panic, Jacob takes his wives and children to a place of safety and returns to the camp alone to give the whole situation to God. Jacob continued in prayer all night, wrestling with God until he received God's blessing. Jacob's struggle with God had been difficult, painful and exhausting, but he had learned from the consequences of his actions. Jacob knew his very life depended on the outcome of his struggle so he persisted. Jacob gave his all, physical, material, practical, psychological, emotional, behavioural, and spiritual. As a result of Jacob's devotion to God, he was changed from a liar, a cheat and an ambitious deceiver, into a man who persistently clung to God. Is it not sad that Jacob needed to be put in a place of fearful desperation before he finally decides to give time to God and pray?

Are we persistent in putting all areas of our lives before God, as Jacob did that night? How long does it take for us to realise our mistakes and give time to God and pray?

The consequences of our actions can put us in difficult situations. The human frailties of greed, jealousy, selfishness, lust, and all manner of worldly temptations can persuade us into doing the wrong thing. We too, like Jacob, wrestle with demons of the mind that skew our attitude and twist our morals. Jacob eventually found himself in a place where his trickery didn't work, his hard work went against him, and the consequences of his first sin pursued him wherever he went! Only when Jacob stopped trying to justify himself did his circumstances change. It was not simply a matter of asking God to help either. Jacob had to wrestle with God for the blessing he needed. After recognising his wrongdoing and repenting, he needed to let go of his own capabilities, keep faith and hold on to God's original promise throughout his struggle. Jacob didn't give up, despite the difficulty and

pain, he held on until he was given an answer. God's Word can be just as demanding a struggle to grasp the Truth of what it says, just as painful a wrestle to discern the true meaning of God's will and purpose for our lives.

How do we wrestle with God? Do we wrestle with our demons or give in to them? Do we manage to let go of ourselves, keep faith and hold on to God's promises?

We too have to wrestle with a supernatural being that we cannot fully grasp, but we too have been granted audience through Jesus Christ, understanding through the Holy Spirit, and guidance through the inspired Word of God. It does not matter what this scholar says or that theologian thinks; what matters are your struggles, your thoughts, and what God may be saying to you! God gave Jacob a new name as a sign of how God had changed and saved him. Jacob wasn't the only one to have his name changed by God: Abraham, Sarah, Peter, Paul, were all given new names as a symbolism of how their lives had been changed by knowing Jesus. God changes the lives of those who persevere in their relationship with Him and that includes changing the life of God's Church. Strong character results from struggling under tough conditions. A new name is a symbol of how God has changed a person. Israel as a people struggled with God and limped away with a blessing; we as the people of God will struggle, but if we persist we, as God's children and Body of Christ, will also limp away with a blessing.

Are we known by the way God has changed and saved us as Jacob was? Are we persistent in putting all areas of the Church before God?

We will all wrestle with God's Word from time to time, like Jacob, but we must persevere for Truth and justice, until we know God's love and gain His blessings for eternity. Do not be tempted to cheat! Do not let yourself be cheated! Live by God's Word, not what others may believe.

"All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, so that everyone that belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work" (2 Timothy 3:16).

Hymn/Song: Amazing Grace John Newton (1725-1807)

Amazing grace, how sweet the sound
That saved a wretch like me!
I once was lost, but now am found,
Was blind, but now I see.

'Twas grace that taught my heart to fear,
And grace my fears relieved;
How precious did that grace appear,
The hour I first believed!

Through many dangers, toils and snares
I have already come;
God's grace has brought me safe thus far,
And He will lead me home.

The Lord has promised good to me,
His word my hope secures;

He will my shield and portion be
As long as life endures.

And, when this heart and flesh shall fail,
And mortal life shall cease,
I shall possess within the veil
A life of joy and peace.

When we've been there ten thousand years,
Bright shining as the sun,
We've no less days to sing God's praise
Than when we first begun.

Poem: If My People ©Janice Morgan 2019

*Based on: **2 Chronicles 7:14** "If My people who are called by My Name humble themselves, pray, seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land."*

If only My people would pray before they speak
I would hear and answer and give them My Word.

If only My people would let go of self
I would show them My face and light up My path.

If only My people would show true remorse
I could forgive them and heal them with My endless love.

If only My people, ah if only My people,
If only My people would come!
