

**Weekly Devotions**  
**South Holburn Church**  
**2nd November 2021**

## **READINGS**

That night Jacob got up and took his two wives, his two female servants and his eleven sons and crossed the ford of the Jabbok. After he had sent them across the stream, he sent over all his possessions. So Jacob was left alone, and a man wrestled with him till daybreak. When the man saw that he could not overpower him, he touched the socket of Jacob's hip so that his hip was wrenched as he wrestled with the man.

Then the man said, "Let me go, for it is daybreak."

But Jacob replied, "I will not let you go unless you bless me."

The man asked him, "What is your name?"

"Jacob," he answered.

Then the man said, "Your name will no longer be Jacob, but Israel, because you have struggled with God and with humans and have overcome."

Jacob said, "Please tell me your name."

But he replied, "Why do you ask my name?" Then he blessed him there.

So Jacob called the place Peniel, saying, "It is because I saw God face to face, and yet my life was spared."

The sun rose above him as he passed Peniel, and he was limping because of his hip.

Therefore, to this day the Israelites do not eat the tendon attached to the socket of the hip, because the socket of Jacob's hip was touched near the tendon.

*Genesis 32:22-32*

## REFLECTION

Jacob. His name means 'heel-grabber', and is a reference to manner in which he was born, holding onto the heel of his twin brother Esau. But the name means much more; it means 'deceit', it means 'to trip someone up', it means 'sneak attack'. And Jacob certainly lived up to his name! Manoeuvring his brother out of his birth right, tricking his blind and dying father for a blessing intended for Esau, then running like a coward from his brother's wrath. Not exactly a great CV for a leader of God's community. More of an unlikeable sod and truly appalling human being!

Twenty years later Jacob decides to come home, to return with all the massive wealth he has amassed, and his family beside him. And then he discovers Esau is coming to meet him, coming with an army of 400 men, coming despite the gift Jacob has sent him - perhaps we should call it a bribe!

So we join Jacob on the night before he meets his brother, the night before he crosses into his homeland. He has sent his family on ahead. He has sent the caravan of all his wealth on ahead. He waits by the river alone. And it is there that he has this strange encounter with a stranger.

But I wonder what Jacob's first thought was when he was grabbed by his attacker? I bet it was not - Oh look God has come to bless me! More likely, he thought it was Esau taking a leaf out of Jacob's book and attacked him secretly at night when he is alone. So, Jacob fights. He fights for his very life. But it's not Esau. Nor anyone Esau has sent to do away with Jacob. Jacob's attacker is God. How ironic that Jacob's prayer to God for protection from Esau. For Esau wasn't his problem! It was God who was Jacob's problem. It wasn't Esau he needs protection from, it was God! It was God who wrestled with Jacob. it was God who leaves him lame. It was God who tore down Jacob.

Does it make you uncomfortable to think of God wrestling with Jacob in this desperate struggle?

Ron Dunn writes these words:

"Our toughest battles are with God not the devil. I am not denying the reality of spiritual warfare with Satanic powers. I am saying that I find it easier to say no to the devil than to say yes to God."

Does that make you uncomfortable? To think of God as the one with whom we often battle?

After Jacob struggles with God, he gets a new name. 'Israel' - which means 'strives with God'. It is as if God rips the 'Jacob' out of Jacob and leaves an 'Israel'! God takes from him all the deceit, all the trickiness for which he has become famous and turns the conman into a prince. Jacob has been running for 20 years. Hiding out - from his family, from his brother, from God. But now, on this night, by the riverbank, God overtakes him, and Jacob cannot run. It seems that before he can go on with his journey home Jacob must admit who he is. Not just his name, but all that is associated with that name, all that he has done. And it is only when the battle over that Jacob can move on. Not just move on, but also receive God's blessing.

Jacob is not unique! God wants to bless all of us. But there is so much in our lives and our stories and our nature that turns us away from God. I know that when I look back over my life, I don't always see faithfulness to God's call; I don't see much that resembles deep and powerful faith. In fact, I am much more conscious as I reflect on it, of God drafting me into his work rather than my volunteering! What I see is God dragging me kicking and screaming every step of the way.

Yet God does not give up on us. God goes to battle for us and with us. God's deepest desire is to lead us to a greater love, a greater peace, and deeper faith and a truer relationship with himself. And God's way is always the better way.

Ron Dunn again says:

"... what is deep and amazing about this is that it gives me a deep peace because I know that God has set his love on me and whatever my hard-headedness, he will not abandon me to myself. He will pursue me with a stubborn love that will not let me go."

God love you, God wants to bless you, and God will never give up on you – God will even battle with you to draw you closer!

## PRAYER

Lord God,  
You are not fooled by us,  
We cannot pretend with you,  
For you see our secret selves.

Yet you never give up on us.  
You who have given all for us,  
Go on wrestling for us,  
Shaping us into your people.

Loving God,  
May we respond to your love willingly,  
May we follow you -  
Even when we face change and challenge.  
And may we know your blessing in our lives

In Jesus name we offer our prayers,  
Amen.

