

The Way x18. Sunday 05 May_2019.

Waiting and Wrestling as God makes a Way.

READ: Genesis 32: 1-5 and 21 - 32 and Hebrews 11: 1 - 6

This year through our Sunday study and reflection on Scripture we aim to see a clear thread of teaching and revelation about God showing **a way forward and a way through** that we can **follow individually and as a people** – whether we are in life journeying in an easy friendly place or a hostile, lonely wilderness. JESUS declared himself to be **the Way** (to the Father *John 14: 6*) and his followers are described as those who ***belonged to the Way.*** (*Acts 9: 2*)

Last week we began considering the importance of WAITING as part of journeying in life. And certainly, WAITING is central to a journey of FAITH.

For the early followers of Jesus, **the time between the resurrection and Pentecost was a time of waiting.** The instruction of the Risen Jesus to WAIT in the city until they are clothed with “power from on high” didn’t come in a vacuum. The oral history and Scriptures of the Hebrews is full of instruction about the need to WAIT for God’s empowering and timing. Waiting times may appear to us to be times of delay or wasted time but a lot can happen to us and within us during these times if we focus on God. We often quote to one another in this church community ***Isaiah 40: 31*** *Those who wait upon the LORD will find their strength renewed. They will rise up on wings like eagles; they will run and not get weary; they will walk and not grow weak.*

In *Luke 24: 49* Jesus tells the disciples to wait (SIT – KATHISATE) *in the city of Jerusalem to be clothed with power so that they become witnesses to him.* And in *Acts 1: 4* Luke writes that Jesus told them to *wait for the gift they had been promised* (PERIMENTO – to await an event). **Are you waiting with expectancy and faith at the moment? Are you praying and longing for something to happen in your life or through this church?**

Every long journey (and life is a long journey) is interspersed with times of sitting and waiting or periods of rest or of struggle. Spiritual Journeying is not always continuous waiting, but it does contain seasons of struggle with life’s challenges and with our own personalities as well as those of others.

Question: what does it mean to wait upon God?

One of the things it means is to face up to who we are – our limitations but also our potentials, our pasts and our presents, as well as our futures. We are humans made in the image of God and made to live in relationship with God and so empowered living. Waiting on God encompasses being still long enough to face ourselves while in the company of God. (Sometimes we are accompanied by others and sometimes we are on our own).

How good are you at waiting and particularly how good are you at waiting for God to do what he has promised?

HOW do we learn to develop and sustain an attitude of waiting with expectant trust for God to make us aware of his presence and touch us by the Spirit? We

discussed REFLECTING on what has happened in our lives, reflecting on Scripture and the many historical and life stories it tells and records...

Telling the story of someone who found it difficult to wait (and a night encounter with God). **Backstory Jacob and Esau....** (Biblical timeline 1836-1689 BC) Perhaps the “wrestling match in the night” is one of the strangest stories in the Bible?

ABRAHAM and Sarah’s son Isaac married Rebekah and she gave birth to twins: Esau the eldest and Jacob. We are told (Gen 25) that they struggled in her womb and when she asked God why he said it was because 2 nations struggled within her, one stronger than another and the older will serve the younger. The first born was red and hairy (Esau) and the second Jacob was born holding onto his brother’s heel. (Jacob means grasper)

The Scripture tells the story of Esau the hunter giving up his birth right as the first born to his quieter brother Jacob who had stayed at home and cooked a pan of red lentil potage. In this family the parents were divided, and Isaac favoured Esau and Rebekah favoured Jacob. The family also lived with the expectation that God had promised to bless Abraham, and then Isaac with many descendants. (Esau married 2 Hittite (and Canaanites – other religion) women who made Isaac and Rebekah’s lives miserable).

(Gen 27) We are then told how taking advantage of Isaac’s failing eye sight Rebekah and Jacob steal the blessing that Esau should have received as first born. Rebekah knew that trouble was brewing between Esau and Jacob because of all the trickery that had gone on so under the excuse of sending Jacob away to look for a bride from his own people she get’s Jacob sent away to Laban – a distant relative. On his journey to Mesopotamia he rests and dreams the now famous dream of a “stairway to heaven” and angels going up and down and hears the promise that God will give him all this land. He knew he had met with God and in the morning named the place BETHEL – house of God. He built a memorial stone there to mark this point on the way.

Once Jacob found Laban at Haran, he agreed to work for him and fell in love with his second daughter Rachel who he loved. He worked for 7 years and expected to receive Rachel as his bride but the Father Laban smuggled Leah into his bed and so he was given Rachel a week later but had to work another 7 years to also pay for Rachel. (So, Jacob who had tricked his brother Esau out of his birth right and blessing experienced being tricked himself and as he and his brother were rivals now he lived with wives who were rivals. (Poetic Justice)

We are told the story of Jacob eventually falling out with Laban because of his successful breeding programme for sheep and goats and how he longs to return to his family – even Esau who may hate him. Long and tricky negotiations for Laban to release Jacob and take his grandchildren away which I won’t go into here. But as Jacob gets closer and closer to home – and remember it is many years (20 ish) since he left home under a cloud of his own making, he becomes scared as to how Esau will respond to him and his family. Remember he tricked his brother (out of birth right and blessing) and they were constantly vying for their parents love and attention.

I am not going into this part of the story – you can read it if you want and Jacob’s plan to ingratiate himself and earn the forgiveness of his “master” Esau. **What I want to focus on is the night of wrestling and darkness Jacob spent** when he had sent all his

family, flocks and household ahead to Esau. **Gen 32: 21 he sent the gifts on ahead of him and spent the night in camp.** Having sent everyone and everything ahead of him **v24 he stayed behind, alone.**

This part of his very long journey was a time of waiting and wrestling in the darkness – on his own. If you've had the sort of life Jacob had – then you are rarely, if ever alone with your thoughts. This may have been the first time he'd been on his own since his dream at Bethel all those years before when he'd seen the "stairway to heaven". The place where he waited was un-named until this point. And until this point "Jacob" was his name.

Our reading told us that a man came and wrestled with him until just before daybreak. This "man" is understood to be a wrestling with the divine – an angel or God himself and we are told that Jacob refused to let the being go even though daylight approached. We are obviously told very little of this wrestling (metaphor of spiritual battling or a literal physical wrestling?) – we assume that it was Jacob wrestling with himself and all he had done, wrestling with his conscience and with God himself and he refused to give up until the being "blessed him". The being dislocated his hip joint and left him with a limp all his life. (What are we asking for when we ask for "blessing" – Jacob always desperate to "be blessed".)

What blessing? Presumably the promise given by Isaac thinking he touched Esau but it was the "Grasper Jacob" (**Read 27: 28, 29**) . The being grants to Jacob that he should be **re-named ISRAEL** – sounds like **he struggles with God**. Then Jacob asks the being for his name and the answer is – why do you want to know my name? (Jews – unspeakable holy name of God). We are told that the being blesses Israel, but we are not told what the blessing is....Jacob-Israel convinced he has **wrestled with God**.

V30 I have seen God face to face, and I am still alive; so he named the place Peniel. (Hebrew: the face of God). **The sun rose as Jacob was leaving Peniel, and he was limping because of his hip.**

Jacob was utterly convinced that he had wrestled with God in the dark of the night as he sought to secure God's blessing.

For many years Jacob had waited for the blessings God had promised (through Isaac) to be fulfilled. He was not in his homeland or even with his family **BUT at Bethel God had promised to bring him back to his homeland and to do all that he had promised in terms of successors and land**. He had waited for this to be fulfilled. The wrestling with God was NOT I believe to squeeze something out of the God who was reluctant **but rather for Jacob to reach the point at the right time when he was ready**.

There are **key events** we too wait for on God's calendar: the coming of the Messiah in the person of Jesus of Nazareth, the coming of the Spirit at Pentecost, the return of Christ and the Judgement Day and so on **BUT there is also the waiting on God with expectancy that we have to do personally** and also the waiting on God as Christ is formed in us. **Romans 8: 29...**

Who came out of this wrestling between Jacob and God the most changed?

This incident reminds me of another wrestling in the night. JESUS wrestling in Gethsemane with himself in the presence of the Father and the Spirit. But we see in Jesus not a wrestling for his own blessing but for strength to do the will of God and to see a mighty inheritance – a great family of redeemed people. *If there is any other way rather than me drinking this cup of suffering, then let it be so – but not my will but yours be done.* **That is the point of wrestling with God - so that change happens in me,** (not just others) and so that I long to please God (not myself or others). The Spirit does struggle with my human spirit, my very nature - my false self so that my true self will be born and the Spirit will only ever want what is best for me.

As **Jesus carried in his body the marks of his struggle**, and as Jacob walked with a limp as a reminder of the struggle with God – so too we may bear various marks of wrestling – Paul's thorn in the flesh kept him in humility (*2 Corinthians 12: 7 – 9*).

WAITING is not always passive. It can be full of struggle, wrestling and encounter with God and in coming face to face with God we through revelation come face to face with ourselves. We may walk away alive but having been touched by God.