

**Hold on and Never Let Go**October 16, 2016 | 22<sup>nd</sup> Sunday after Pentecost**Genesis 32:22-30**

<sup>22</sup> 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. <sup>23</sup> After he had sent them across the stream, he sent over all his possessions. <sup>24</sup> So Jacob was left alone, and a man wrestled with him till daybreak. <sup>25</sup> 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. <sup>26</sup> Then the man said, "Let me go, for it is daybreak." But Jacob replied, "I will not let you go unless you bless me." <sup>27</sup> The man asked him, "What is your name?" "Jacob," he answered. <sup>28</sup> 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." <sup>29</sup> Jacob said, "Please tell me your name." But he replied, "Why do you ask my name?" Then he blessed him there. <sup>30</sup> So Jacob called the place Peniel, saying, "It is because I saw God face to face, and yet my life was spared."

Where do you see yourself five years from now? What goals will you pursue? Will you strive to live a more healthy lifestyle; diet and exercise to avoid sickness? Do you have financial goals; saving for your children's future or your own retirement? Or its just breaking that bad habit that has persisted so long. Our Bible lesson this morning follows a man who once he set his heart to something, could never let go. At birth he was given the name Jacob which means "heal grabber" because he came out of the womb holding onto his brothers ankle. This striving doesn't only define Jacob's life but ours as well, and this morning we learn with Jacob how to hold on and never let go; we cling to God for forgiveness, and we cling to God for His blessing.

*I. Cling to God for Forgiveness*

We've been there before. So anxious about something we couldn't sleep. Our mind keeps turning and turning... Sometimes we play the same scene over and over in our head asking ourselves, "what could I have done differently, what should I have said?" Or maybe you've been just around the corner of a life changing moment: the interview for the job you've always wanted, the night before the wedding, the night before the hospital... Jacob had sleep problems too. He was one night away from a confrontation that was over twenty years in the making... what would happen? Would he live or die? Would his family survive?

Jacob was the perfect picture of the self-made man. From an early age he used his cleverness and ingenuity to rise to the top of any situation. Of the two sons, Jacob and Esau, we are told that Esau was their father Isaac's favorite. Esau as the first-born had the birth-rite, which was a 2/3<sup>rd</sup> portion of his father's inheritance. But one day, Esau came in from hunting famished, so hungry he told Jacob he was about to die... so Jacob who was brewing a pot of stew told him he could only have a bowl of soup if he sold him the birth-rite. Esau agreed. He sold Jacob half of his inheritance for a bowl of soup! As the favorite son, Esau was also due to receive the special blessing from his father. But when Isaac seemed determined to bless Esau, Jacob and his mother took things into their own hands. They dressed Jacob in the clothes of Esau and covered his arms with goat hair so when their blind father Isaac smelled Esau and felt the hairy arms of Esau he gave the blessing to Jacob. Twice Jacob had taken what had belonged to his brother, and so Esau was planning on killing Jacob.

We admire self-made people; people who are able to pull themselves up by their own bootstraps. Yet, self-reliance has spiritually disastrous consequences. All of Jacob's scheming and planning only ended up with his brother trying to kill him. But the greater danger is when we are confronted with a problem and we rely on our own ability to overcome. Often times the anxiety we feel is a symptom of a greater problem: trying to play god; relying on ourselves to fix what is out of our control. This is a grievous sin against the first commandment which requires our perfect love and trust in God alone through all circumstances. Yet it is so easy to do this, isn't it? When confronted with an obstacle our first reaction is to sit down and say, "What do I need to do? How can I fix this? How can I make my life better?"

Yet for all of Jacob's cleverness, all his plans blew up in his face, because ultimately he had to wrestle with the reality that there were things out of his control—things like his brother's heart that he had no power to change. So after 20 years, Jacob had to face his brother Esau. And now in the grip of despair, God comes to Jacob in a special way—as a man. And Jacob engages in a real physical and spiritual wrestling match with God. It is as if God is coming to Jacob to wrestle out of his hands control of his future.

For all the times we have tried to solve things on our own, for all the times we have brought ruin and disaster down on ourselves through our own scheming and planning, God would have us look to another wrestling match: One where Jesus, the God-man begged and pleaded with the Father to "take the cup of suffering away from him." In the Garden of Gethsemane Jesus knew exactly what would happen: He would be arrested, tried, beaten, flogged, and crucified—and that only describes the physical pain! Yet Jesus' prayer ends with the powerful statement: "Not My will but Your will be done" (Luke 22:42). It was God's will that Jesus endure for our sakes. He suffered the consequences for all of the mistakes we have ever made—He drank the cup of God's wrath down to the last drop. All to give you His birth-rite: the forgiveness of sins.

## *II. Cling to God for His blessing*

God's promise of forgiveness through Jesus is the greatest blessing He has in store for you. But we also learn from Jacob's wrestling match with God that God would also have us cling to Him for all blessings. We're told in Hosea 12:3-4 "In the womb he grasped his brother's heel; as a man he struggled with God. He struggled with the angel and overcame him; he wept and begged for his favor." This was as much a spiritual conflict as it was a physical conflict. Knowing he was forgiven, Jacob pleaded with God to deliver him from his brother's wrath. He begged and pleaded with God for his blessing.

Yet, God's initial response seems shocking—he dislocates Jacob's hip. For a wrestler to have a dislocated hip would spell disaster. He would immediately be off balance; it would be painful to stand, kneel, or crawl. With this injury, it would seem as though God was trying to discourage Jacob, to overcome him. Yet, it had exactly the opposite effect, didn't it? Rather discouraging Jacob, his injury spurred him on all the more to desperately cling to God, refusing to let him go until he was given the blessing. In every way, God draws this prayer out of Jacob.

What prayer is God drawing out of you? Is there a pain in your life? God uses these things in a loving way to draw us closer to Him: A struggle with addiction can seem all-consuming; feeling

as if there is no way out. Struggle with disease and sickness; just when you think things are starting to get better they suddenly take a turn for the worse. It is very easy to feel overcome by these, but Jesus is drawing this prayer out of us, a desperate hope by faith that can only cling to God and His grace.

But here's the amazing thing: God gives Jacob a new name, Israel. One who contends with God, "and overcomes!" Just think of a mere man like Jacob wrestling against the almighty God and winning! God not only allowed this to happen, he wanted it to happen. We have a God who desires to be overcome by his saints through prayer! How is that possible? Because as God's children redeemed and forgiven through Jesus Christ, we have access to all of God's promises in Holy Scripture. God promises us things like, "I will work this out for your good." He says, "I will never leave you nor forsake you," He promises, "I will always provide a way out for you in temptation, that no difficulty is too great for you."

As Jacob, we are Israel too when we contend with God through His promises. There is another reason your prayers are effective with God: Because you do not pray alone. You have a mediator, the God-man, Jesus Christ who pleads on your behalf. God has already accepted Jesus once on your behalf when He laid his life down for you. How much more will he open His heart to you when you cry out to Him in Jesus' name?

Jacob, the heal-grabber, prevailed against God that day. God forgave his sins, God blessed him and prevented Esau from harming Jacob and his family. We also boldly hold on to Christ and never let go. On account of Him God hears our prayers. Amen.