

MINISTER'S MESSAGE

SUNDAY, AUGUST 2, 2020

KNOX PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

"Women & Children First"

Based on Genesis 32:22-31

Have you ever spent the night tossing and turning over some difficult matter that keeps rolling over and over in your mind?

- Maybe it was something that happened during the day that re-plays in your mind like a movie projector that's stuck.
- Maybe it is a difficult conversation you have to have with someone that you kept reciting over and over, hoping have the words just right for all the possible scenarios that might unfold the next day.
- Maybe it is a difficult decision you don't want to make, but know you have to make, and you kept trying to imagine other possible solutions.
- Maybe you are angry over something.
- Maybe you were overwhelmed with grief.
- Maybe you were worried sick.

Whatever the reason, you woke up the next morning feeling like you had been put through the spin cycle of the washing machine. Every bone in your body ached to the core. Eyes swollen from tears or lack of sleep, stomach nauseous,

mind fuzzy, and judgment clouded. This is how I imagine Jacob was feeling the morning after wrestling with some unknown person, angel, prophet, petty thief, God? It's a good thing it didn't rain that night. If the river had swollen, he would never have made it back to his family and his sheep.

So about that...

Several years have passed since we last encountered Jacob. At that time he had been a young man in love, working feverishly for his prospective father-in-law, with a plan to marry his daughter; which took a strange turn and became a marriage to the other daughter, and seven years more work, and finally, the marriage he wanted. Today, we encountered an older, and hopefully wiser Jacob: a father of eleven, and owner of many donkey, sheep, cattle, camels, and servants (Genesis 32:5). He had done well, considering he had nothing when he first saw Rachel by the well. But now there has been a falling out with his father-in-law, and Jacob decided that it was time to return home: to his homeland, and to his brother.

- ❖ To flaunt his return of wealth and power?
- ❖ Or to reconcile for past wrongs?

Jacob sent scouts ahead, to 'test the waters' so to speak, and see if he could get a hint at how his brother Esau might respond

to word that his brother was coming home. Let's not forget, that Jacob had been the one who had stolen the family inheritance and then ran away under the threat of death by his brother's hand. So it was difficult to know how Esau might take this news of a prospective homecoming. (I never did like the story of the Prodigal Son!)

- ❖ Was Jacob coming back to take his place as head of the family?
- ❖ Or to make peace with his family?

Word came back to Jacob that Esau and four hundred men were on their way to greet him. Wow! That didn't sound very good. Maybe Esau wanted all his sheep and cattle.

Maybe Esau still wanted him dead. Jacob considered his options. He took some of the finest animals and sent them ahead as a 'gift' or a 'peace offering' depending on how you see this whole thing going down. Then he split up his remaining herds into sections, and started moving them into position so that if Esau attacked, the walls of sheep would slow things down and give Jacob time to adapt his defensive strategy, rather like a game of Minecraft on the PS4. (ask your grandchildren)

Jacob was as prepared as possible. Walls of sheep fanned out on one side of the Jabbok River and he and his family on the other. But as evening fell,

Jacob changed his mind, gathered his family and moved them across the river closer to the sheep and to Esau. He then went back across the river and spent the night alone.

- ❖ Did Jacob have a premonition of the difficult night he was about to have and wanted to protect his family?
- ❖ Or did Jacob attempt to put up one more barrier between his brother and himself. Esau would have to kill women and children to get to him?

You will have to decide on that one.

So Jacob was left alone, and a man wrestled with him till daybreak. (Genesis 32:24)

Who exactly did Jacob wrestle with, so much, and for so long, that he was worn out and sore, and troubled when dawn broke over the horizon?

- It's possible it was a thief, taking the opportunity to attack a man, alone on a dark night.
- Scholars generally agree that he wrestled with YHWH because of the phrase in Verse 28: *"Your name will no longer be Jacob, but Israel, because you have struggled with God and with humans and have overcome."*
- I suggest to you: Jacob wrestled with himself.

Jacob had not had an easy life. But Jacob had not made things easy for himself either. In fact, his trickery, and self-importance along the way, had made him his own worst enemy, from time to

time. Just when things would be looking up for Jacob, and he would get a few steps ahead, his need to have the upper hand, or get something for nothing would overtake fairness and patience and then he would be in a mess again. It was hard to take Jacob at face value, for it always felt like there was a second scheme at play under the surface.

But now here he was: alone, fearing death by his brother's hand, having overstayed his friendships and alliances, with no other direction than to go home and face the music; to face himself. It is said that God made each of us in His image, and if this is so, then when we look upon God, one of the things we see, is a reflection of ourselves. Which is why it is so difficult sometimes, to speak honestly to our Creator, because He reflects back to us, that which we try to ignore, or pretend doesn't exist, or push out of our minds for the moment.

Here, in this moment by the River Jabbok, Jacob had no one to pass the blame off to, nowhere to run to, no one to trick. It was just he, and YHWH. And the truth, which Jacob had pushed away time and time again over the years, began to be revealed.

My friends, there comes a day for each of us, when it doesn't really matter where the journey of life has taken us, how successful or not we have been, how many places or not we have travelled to, how many adventures we have had, how many stories we could share; there comes a time when each of us must come to terms with our unfinished business. No one likes to deal with unfinished business,

because it is painful and humbling and sometimes, downright embarrassing: what we have done or said, or not done and not said, but should have been said. We hold on to these memories, rather than deal with them. But after a while, in truth, those memories hold us. They trap us, and they catch up to us.

At some point, at some moment in time, the reflection of who you really are will be reflected back to you. And it is sobering to think what that reflection might show. But that is what God asks of us: to look honestly at ourselves, to wrestle with it, and then, to finish the unfinished business. Whatever it takes. Whatever needs to be said. Whatever needs to be done.

Why?

So when you cross the River Jabbok the next morning, you can move forward with the day, forward with the journey of life, knowing that whatever comes, whatever happens or doesn't happen, you have finished with the unfinished business, your heart is uncluttered, your Spirit is free.

It took Jacob almost a lifetime to learn this lesson.

How long will it take you?