

Some verses from the hymn "Wrestling Jacob" by Charles Wesley:

Come, O thou traveller unknown,
Whom still I hold, but cannot see!
My company before is gone,
And I am left alone with thee;
With thee all night I mean to stay,
And wrestle till the break of day.

In vain thou strugglest to get free;
I never will unloose my hold!
Art thou the man that died for me?
The secret of thy love unfold:
Wrestling, I will not let thee go,
Till I thy name, thy nature know.

'Tis Love! 'Tis Love! Thy diedst for me!
I hear the whisper in my heart;
The morning breaks, the shadows flee,
Pure, universal love thou art;
To me, to all, thy mercies move:
Thy nature and thy name is Love.

A Prayer

O God, with whom we wrestle until the break of day,
make us long to seek your face;
that in our wounds we may know you,
and in your blessing we may find our selves,
through Jesus Christ. Amen.

Next week

2. Moses: Standing on holy ground

Exodus 3. 1-15

The Brickhills and Stoke Hammond

Lent Course 2017

Pilgrims: Meeting God on the journey

God of our pilgrimage,
you have willed that the gate of mercy
should stand open for those who trust in you:
look upon us with your favour
that we who follow the path of your will
may never wander from the way of life;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.

1. Jacob: Struggling with God

Genesis 32. 22-30

These were the Bible readings for Holy Communion on Sunday:

Genesis 32. 22-30

Jacob wrestles through the night with a stranger—and believes he has met with God.

Acts 9. 1-9

Saul's encounter with the risen Christ on the road to Damascus. 'Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?'

Luke 18. 1-8

Jesus' parable of the unjust judge and the persistent widow, as an encouragement to faith, persistence and prayer.

“The art of living is more like wrestling than dancing”
(Marcus Aurelius)

There may be time in our lives when we feel that we are dancing with life and with God, and times when we feel more as if we are wrestling.

The story of Jacob’s life is in many ways a story of hurt and confusion: He was born just after his twin brother Esau, and was born ‘grasping Esau’s heel’ (Genesis 25. 26) - hence his name (which means ‘he grasps the heel’, and may also have the sense of ‘he deceives’).

Caught in the tensions between his parents, and rivalry with his brother, he tricked his father into giving him the inheritance that rightly belonged to his brother, the first-born (Genesis 27).

He had to run away from his brother and family, and as he fled he experienced a dream of a ladder or stairway between earth and heaven (Genesis 28. 10-22). He stayed away for 20 years, and when he tried to marry he was tricked at first into marrying the wrong woman (Genesis 29. 15-30), and his family life was difficult and complicated.

In Genesis 32 we meet Jacob at one of the crucial moments of his life, as he was preparing to meet his brother for the first time in many years. He had sent his family and all his possessions on ahead of him, and he waited – spending the night alone in the darkness.

Some questions for reflection

Do we find any connections between Jacob’s experience of meeting with God, and our own experience in life and faith?

What did Jacob gain from his experience—how did it change him? And how is this reflected in his change of name.

What do we think of the idea of ‘struggling with God’ as part of our life and faith?

Jacob was marked by his struggle - he was hurt, and he demanded a blessing. In fact the word ‘bless’ includes the idea of a ‘wound’ – the two ideas run close together.

What do we think of this idea (we may reflect on the risen Christ still bearing the marks of his suffering and death)?

Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote this about the writer of Psalms that challenge God in the face of suffering:

He takes up the struggle against God for God

What do we think of this, alongside the gospel parable about the persistent widow?

Where in the story of Jacob do we find the gospel (good news) for us?

And where in the story of Jacob do we find God’s challenge for us?