

Genesis 32:22-32
Wrestling with God
WRCoB 10.17.21

Last week, I introduced Jacob.

I told you last week
He duped his brother and father
Out of his brother's inheritance.

What I didn't do is tell you
About how this all came about.

Isaac, the son of Abraham, and his wife Rebekah had twins!

Obviously, it was not an easy pregnancy.

It felt to her, that they were constantly fighting
And no doubt they were!

And when the time came for her to give birth
She delivered two very different boys!

The first born they named, Esau.

Esau in Hebrew means "hairy"
For he was covered with red fur-like hair!

The second-born came out
Hanging on to the heel of his brother Esau's foot!

So guess what Isaac and Rebekah named him?

Yep, “heel!”

Jacob in Hebrew means “heel”.

Now, imagine naming your twin boys, Hairy and Heel?

Certainly not the most complimentary of names!

And if it is true that we grow into our names

Jacob certainly grew into his!

According to the Merriam Webster Dictionary,

One of a number of meanings of the word heel is this:

“A contemptible person.”

Jacob did in fact personify his name

And yet, God had big plans for Jacob!

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Jacob and Esau were forty-years-old

When Rebekah connived with Jacob

To steal Esau’s inheritance as the first born.

Following Esau’s identity theft

Rebekah told Jacob he’d better flee for his life.

Esau had plans to rip Jacob apart, limb by limb.

And so, Jacob fled 400 miles to Haran

To his Uncle Laban’s place where he found refuge.

Jacob lived in Haran for 20 years.

He is now 60-years-old.

Twenty years he lived knowing he had cheated his brother.

Twenty years he lived apart from his mom and brother.

But during those 20 years

 Despite his uncle's exploitive nature
 Jacob prospered.

He married two sisters, Leah and Rachel

 And became a very rich man!

Even still, with all his prosperity

 Jacob was haunted by his past
 And wanted to go back home.

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In the beginning verses of chapter 32

 We read where Jacob sends messengers
 To inform Esau
 That Jacob was coming home.

Obviously, a risky move for Jacob!

He left knowing Esau had planned to kill him.

When the messengers returned, they told Jacob

32:6 “We went to your brother Esau, and now he is coming to meet you, and four hundred men are with him.

Doesn't sound like Esau is planning a welcome home party.

Jacob, now greatly frightened with the news
Split his people and property into two groups
Hoping that if one group was attacked
The other could be spared.

Jacob then prayed a prayer to God, verses 9-12
Reminding God that it was God himself
Who told him to return to his home-land.

He prayed God to deliver him
From the hands of his brother
Whom he had cheated so many years ago.

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Night fell.

Nervous and jittery, Jacob
Decides to send gifts on ahead of him.

And so, he selects 200 female goats, 20 male goats
200 ewes and 20 rams
30 female camels and their young
40 cows and 10 bulls
20 female donkeys and ten male donkeys.

He separated each herd and sent a herder along with them.

They were to meet Esau and give him these gifts.

One by one, in four separate groups
They were to approach Esau
Give him the gifts and say

Genesis 32:20 Moreover your servant Jacob is behind us.

Jacob hoped these waves of gifts
Would soften Esau's heart
When they'd come face-to-face.

After he sends them on their way
They settled down for the night
On the banks of the River Jordan.

But Jacob didn't sleep.

And for that matter, he didn't let anyone else sleep either.

He got up and gathered his wives, Rachel and Leah
The rest of his family
And the rest of his property

And sent them across the river and on their way
Leaving Jacob by himself on the far side of the river.

Jacob, now alone, wrestles with someone through the night.

He fought so hard his hip was displaced.

At dawn, his foe got up to leave, but Jacob said
I will not let you go until you bless me!

The man, whom we assume was an agent of God's
Asked Jacob to tell him his name
And when he did, he said

You shall no longer be Jacob, but Israel, for you have striven with God and with humans and have prevailed (28).

And as the sun rose on that new day
Israel, who was once known as Jacob the “Heel”
Went forward to meet his brother Esau.

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Jacob at the age of 60
Needed to make things right with Esau!

But the decision to do so comes at great risk.

The question, really, for Jacob was this.

Is it better to live with the guilt and remorse of past sins
Estranged from your family and loved ones?

Or is it better to come clean
To make it right, seek reconciliation
Even if it comes at great?

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I believe, this is what Jacob wrestled with that night.

He was sick of living with the sins of the past
But he feared Esau’s wrath.

Jacob wrestled with God
Knowing he needed to do what he needed to do
But feeling weak-kneed about it all!

And God blessed him with strength and determination.

Today's scripture is a powerful lesson
On the need to wrestle with your conscience!

I mean, isn't it true that we've all wrestled with God
Somehow, in some way, at some point in time?!

Wrestled to do the right thing?

You've lain awake with the burden of past mistakes
With poor decisions?

Lain awake, haunted by destroyed relationships
Between brother and sister, parent and child
Husband and wife?

What do we do?

Live with a sense of guilt our whole life?

Or come clean
Face up to our past squarely?

What do we do?

We do what Jacob did!

We wrestle with God.

We wrestle with God until we're lame
Wrestle with him until the break of day!

Wrestle until we receive God's blessing.

That's what Jacob did.

And that's what we should do too!

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Despite his injured hip

Jacob found strength when the day dawned.

He crossed the river determined

To make right with his brother or be killed trying.

Come what may, Jacob was seeing this through.

Genesis 33:1-4 NLT

33 Then Jacob looked up and saw Esau coming with his 400 men. So he divided the children among Leah, Rachel, and his two servant wives. ² He put the servant wives and their children at the front, Leah and her children next, and Rachel and Joseph last.

³ Then Jacob went on ahead. As he approached his brother, he bowed to the ground seven times before him.

Bowing low to the ground

Jacob did not see what was coming next

⁴ Then Esau ran to meet him and embraced him, threw his arms around his neck, and kissed him. And they both wept.

So unexpected!

So welcomed!

Maybe you have spent sleepless nights
 Agonizing over past mistakes.

Isn't it time to make it right?

Jacob did it when he was 60-years-old.

There's hope for me and you!

It is never too late to ask for forgiveness!

Never too late to reconcile with family and friends
 As long as you still have breath.

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In our lesson today

 The place where Jacob wrestled with God
 He named Peniel, meaning

32:30 For I have seen God face-to-face.

Upon their meeting, Jacob attempted
 To offer his gifts to Esau
 But Esau refused them.

Jacob insisted saying

**33:10 No, please; if I find favor with you, then accept my
present from my hand; for truly to see your face is like
seeing the face of God.**

Seeing his face was like seeing the face of God.

And what does God's face look like?

God's face is the face of forgiveness

The face of mercy

The face of grace

The face of love.

That was what Jacob saw in the face of Esau.

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Jesus tells a similar story

Of a son who took his inheritance early.

And spent it on over-the-top living

Until the money ran out and left him destitute.

He had nothing left to do

Except to return home

Hoping he, too, like Jacob

Would be accepted back

The son's father saw him coming down the road.

And instead of waiting on the porch for him to approach

He jumped off the porch and ran down the road to meet him.

And like Esau, kissed, embraced and wept over him.

In the father's unconditional love and grace

Lavished on his long, lost son

We also see God face-to-face.

And if we personify our names
Then the greatest personification of names
Is found in Jesus, Immanuel, God with us.

For in Jesus, we meet God face-to-face.

In Jesus we see the face of forgiveness
We see the face of grace and mercy

We see the face of sacrificial and unconditional love.

So the next time
You find yourself wrestling with a guilty conscience
Remember the story of Jacob.

Wrestle with it until you receive God's blessing.

And only then will you meet God face-to-face.

(Confession of Sin)