

Wrestling with God



Jacob Wrestling with the Angel – Rembrandt
Genesis 25 – 50

Wrestling with God

- **Jacob's story:** Jacob's story takes up 25 chapters in Genesis. (It's a family saga, and it's also a Biblical soap opera.)
- **Today's reading:** Jacob is still traveling, and preparing to meet his brother Esau again; even after many years, he's still afraid of what Esau may do to him and his family. (Whatever Esau chooses to do, Jacob knows he deserves it.)
- **Wrestling with fear:** Jacob doesn't sleep, but wrestles all night with the unknown that waits for him in the morning. (But there's Someone else there besides his fears – Someone who won't let him go.)
- **Wrestling with God:** It turns out Jacob is meeting God again; first it was the dream of a ladder joining heaven and earth; now, it's a God who won't let him go.
- **I believe we all wrestle with God,** whether we believe in God or not. There is Something – Someone – who calls us, accompanies us on our way through life, Someone who won't let us go.

- **Andy's story:** For many years, our son Andy was haunted by a version of Christianity that pictures God as judgmental and even condemning. After he died, his last journal was sent to us, and we found notes he'd written while listening to a radio sermon about Jacob.
- There were pages of notes from this sermon that captivated Andy, but the bottom line was this: Jacob was a 'schemer' – and so was Andy – but God loves them anyway, and will never let them go.
- In listening to this sermon, Andy had come face to face with the loving God of Jesus.

Finding the Face of God in the Bible

- **Each of our lessons today** reminds us of a time when someone came face to face with God.
- **Jacob** wrestled with God in the desert, and learned that God was with him every step of the way. (God left his mark on Jacob, a wound he would carry for the rest of his life.)
- **Moses** wrestled not just with God, but with the people of Israel – Jacob's descendents. (God gave Moses the Commandments, and afterwards his face shone with the intensity of the encounter.)
- **Jesus** wrestled with God's call (not just with the devil!) in the desert; and for the rest of his life he followed the direction God had given him. (On the mountain, the disciples came face to face with God's presence.)
- **Paul** never met Jesus in the flesh, but he met him on the road to Damascus. (In a blinding light, Paul came to understand he was moving in the wrong direction.) Later, he would write,

For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known. And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three, and the greatest of these is love.”

(1 Corinthians 13)

- **This God of redeeming love** is the God Andy finally met at the end of his life – through Jacob’s story, read in the light of Jesus.

Wrestling with Jesus

Our culture wrestles with Jesus – or with ideas of Jesus:

- Some ask, “Did Jesus really exist?”
- Others ask, “Was Jesus the Son of God?” and “Must we believe in Jesus to gain eternal life?”
- Some think Jesus a great teacher (but his lessons were meant for a simpler world).
- Some believe Jesus was a window into the nature of God, (the God of love and compassion, not the God of condemnation)?
- Others ask, “Does the loving Spirit of Jesus still live in our world?”

What do you see when *you* wrestle with Jesus?