

St. Luke Ev. Lutheran Church  
Sermon by Pastor Anthony E. Schultz  
April 3, 2016 *2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of Easter.*  
Genesis 32:22-31 Eisenach Series



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." <sup>31</sup> The sun rose above him as he passed Peniel, and he was limping because of his hip. <sup>32</sup> Therefore to this day the Israelites do not eat the tendon attached to the socket of the hip, because the socket of Jacob's hip was touched near the tendon.

People of God – rescued from the flaming lake of fire in Hell by the innocent blood of the Risen Christ:

We don't fly our American Flag every day – but we did fly it on Monday, March 28<sup>th</sup>. We flew it at half-staff because Governor

Scott Walker issued that order in honor of Col. Don Heiliger. Did you know that? Do you know anything about Col. Don Heiliger? I wouldn't either except I got an e-mail from my friend Pastor Kock. Pastor Kock knew Col. Heiliger. Col. Heiliger flew a fighter jet during the Viet Nam War. He flew a very dangerous mission all by himself – in the dark and dead of night. He was forced to eject from his plane and he hid – but the next day he was captured and thrown into prison. Not just any prison – the most terrible prison nicknamed the *Hanoi Hilton*. This was a place of inhuman torture! I think it's just about impossible for us to imagine what that must be like – to be a prisoner of war. It's horrible when you are being tortured and beaten and abused. And it's horrible when you are left all alone – abandoned – alone except for the bugs and the mice and the rats and the screams of fellow prisoners out of their minds. What *would* you do? What *could* you do? One thing that was very important to prisoners was trying to keep track of time. What day is it? What month is it? What hour is it? When it was Sunday – Sunday morning – at 7:45 or say 10:15 it was Church Day! The Col. would close his eyes and imagine Church! Could you do that? Pastors swing open the doors – greeters shake your hands – donuts and coffee on the left. Hang up your coat – up the steps – the ushers hand you a bulletin – look at the cover. Into church you go – to sit the exact same place you always sit. You spend a few moments of quiet time – praying – thinking about your sins and Jesus' forgiveness. The pastor comes out and welcomes you – and tells you a word or two about this second Sunday of Easter – because one Sunday of Easter isn't enough – and you begin to sing your first hymn. How many hymns do you know by heart? Can you sing all four verses of *Amazing Grace*? I bet you could – if you really tried! The confession of sins and absolution. The prayer for the day – asking

for basically one spiritual blessing. Three readings – an Old Testament one – a Psalm – how many do you know by heart – the 23<sup>rd</sup> – the 1<sup>st</sup> – again Mrs. Neumeister taught me that – when I became her student ½ way through 3<sup>rd</sup> grade – maybe 51 – David’s painful confession – Psalm 121 – **I lift up my eyes to the hills** – maybe 150 – praise the LORD with as many Old Testament stringed instruments you can remember – think – think – think! Then an epistle – remember Luther’s encouragement to memorize the whole letter to the Romans? Then a Gospel reading – a Bible story. Have you memorized the Christmas account or the Easter account? Then the Apostles’ Creed – a hymn – a sermon – a prayer – the Lord’s Prayer – the benediction – another hymn! Oh, if only I could go to church – a real church – with pews and a grand piano – and a hymnal and a Bible! Col. Heiliger was more than 2,000 days in prison. When at last he was with other prisoners on Sunday morning – he could be the Pastor – and remind them of God’s Word. With more men – there would be more words to more hymn verses and more Bible verses – and he would plan out the sermon – to remember and recite and apply a verse of God’s Word! And they prayed – they prayed with earnestness that most people probably don’t have all the time! To wrestle with God in prayer. Today God’s Word talks about Jacob.

### Jacob Wrestled With God in Prayer

- i. **The LORD hung on to him**
- ii. **The LORD blessed him**

Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Judah – Jesus’ family tree was not a tree without its troubles. The LORD blessed Isaac and the lovely Rebecca with twins – twin – not identical sons – Jacob and Esau. Jacob and Esau didn’t get along – even before they were born – they didn’t get along – in their mother’s tummy--pushing and shoving and kicking! Esau was born first – but hanging on to

him – the little heel-grabber – the sneaky little usurper Jacob was born – hanging on to his big brother! Esau was born hairy – fuzzy – like he was wearing a little red onesie! Jacob was a little more delicate. Esau loved his dad and his father loved him – hunter – augh, augh, augh! Jacob loved his mom and she loved him best – not all sweaty and dirty and rough and crude like his brother Esau! You remember how Isaac was old – losing his sight – nearing the end – so he asked Esau to go hunting one more time – to get some meat! While he was gone – Jacob and his mom prepared some goat – with the right spice rub – to make it taste wild. Jacob puts some hairy goat-skin on his arms – so he feels like his brother Esau and steals the birth-right – the promise of a double portion of the blessing given to the first-born. The blessing – once spoken – once given can't be withdrawn and so he was angry – I mean red faced – neck vein bulging – making fists – spitting when you talk – *I will kill you and I'm not kidding* angry! Jacob ran – literally for his life. He spent the night so exhausted – a rock worked as a pillow. Jacob dreamed – and in that dream saw Jacob's ladder – steps up to Heaven – with angels going up and down. When Jacob woke up he realized – **the LORD is in this place**. The Great I AM is watching over me! Off to Uncle Laban where everything becomes even more complicated. Seven years of hard work for the hand of the lovely Rachel in marriage – but at the wedding Uncle Laban gives away his daughter Leah. Leah and her servant girl Zilpah! Then Uncle Laban gave Jacob the lovely Rachel. Rachel and her hand maid Bilhah. So Jacob worked 7 more years to pay for Rachel. Now there are two wives – one sister the obvious favorite over the other sister. Babies – there must be babies! Leah got a baby in her tummy. When he was born his name was Reuben. Leah had another baby she named him Simeon. Again she got a baby in her

tummy and named him Levi. She had another baby and named him Judah! Bitterly jealous Rachel gave Jacob her maidservant Bilhah and she got a baby in her tummy – and they named him Dan. Bilhah had another baby and they named him Naphtali! Leah wasn't having any more babies so she gave Jacob her handmaid Zilpah and she had a baby named Gad; Zilpah had another baby and called him Asher. Leah had another son and named him Issachar. Leah had another son and named him Zebulun. Leah had a daughter and named her Dinah. This would not end well. Rachel had a baby and named him Joseph. Rachel had another baby and named him Benjamin. Rachel died – giving birth to Benjamin – and it broke Jacob's heart! What a tangled and complicated story. This was not God's plan for marriage – one man and one woman – made one in Christ. When we don't follow God's plan there is grief!

Fast forward – it has been 20 years Jacob and Esau have been apart. Now at last they are going to meet. Esau is coming – with an army of 400 men – coming to meet Jacob. **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...** Jacob got up and sent Leah and her maid-servant Zilpah and their children in one group and Rachel and her maid-servant Bilhah and all their children in a separate group – so worst case scenario – one group gets attacked by Esau and wiped out – at least the other half would escape and be safe! Good-bye – I hope and pray to see you all safe later – I love you – and then to the other group – Good-bye – I hope and pray to see you all safe later – I love you!

And now Jacob is all alone – all alone by the Jabbok – that flows into the Jordan. <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." This was unique indeed – wrestling in prayer – a spiritual wrestling – and it seems at the same time physical, too! Remember just a few days ago – Maundy Thursday – Jesus praying in the Garden of Gethsemane that Jesus had like dark bloody sweat! This is spiritual warfare – that had actual physical consequences. By the grace of God – Jacob wrestled with all his might. By the grace of God – Jacob fought and would not give up. Finally – in recognition of his God-given perseverance the LORD said to Jacob, Let me go." But Jacob said – I will not let you go unless you bless me." Give me a Gospel promise!" "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." Once again – every time someone called his name – Israel would be reminded of this wondrous night. Every time anyone called his name – there would be the Gospel reminder – the LORD will make you strong enough – strong enough to persevere!

<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." <sup>31</sup> The sun rose above him as he passed Peniel, and he was limping because of his hip. *I saw God face to face!* When I was little – we had the portrait of Jesus hanging up in our home – the classic Salman painting of Jesus – wearing a cream colored gown – with long dark brown hair – and a soft brown beard – and a little white circle like a communion waver on his forehead and a little white place on his cheek like a communion chalice. And I was sure – if I ever

saw someone who looked like this picture – it would be Jesus himself. You get a little older and you realize where you see Jesus is not in a painting – not in a video or movie. Where you see Jesus is on the pages of Scripture. Prof. Eickmann used to say – you don't need to fly El Al to Israel – to walk down the winding stone road – down the Mt. of Olives – across the Brook Kidron – and up to Jerusalem to the hill shaped like a skull of cream colored stone – or to the garden nearby with the grave with the track where the stone is rolled away from the entry way. You have been there, too, on the pages of Scripture. You have seen the risen Christ – through the eyes of the Ladies come to finish putting spice on Jesus' body. You have seen Jesus through the eyes of doubting Thomas – and by grace through faith we touch the nail and spear wounds and call out – **“My Lord and my God!”**

**Then he blessed him there.** The LORD has blessed us – blessed us with the forgiveness of all our sins – and an inheritance stored up for us in Heaven. This changes everything! It changes how we live our day to day life! Imagine you are in line to check out with your groceries at the Piggly Wiggly. A little grandma is ahead of you – and they take all her groceries out of the cart beep, beep, beep – swipe, swipe, swipe – beep, beep, beep. “Is plastic ok? Good!” Now it's time to pay – and the little grandma with snow white hair is all confused. How do you do that she asks? Here is a card – an appointment at the dentist. Here is a coupon. Here is my driver's license! What do I do? How do I do this? I don't remember? Excuse me – excuse me! Are you going to complain? No – would you say – Jesus would like to pay for your groceries! What? Jesus wants to pay for your groceries. How much? Here you go! Seriously? Yes, Jesus will take care of this! How simple is this? Generous? Compared to dying on the  $\dagger$  it is not worth mentioning! Can you afford to do that? Imagine – just a

little while later stopping at Subway Sub to get some 6" subs on flat bread. How much? The young man putting napkins in the little plastic bag – and spinning it shut says, "It's already paid for!" "No it's not – I just got by you. How much does it cost?" "The guy pulling out of the parking lot paid for your sandwiches!" "You're kidding?!" "No...he paid!" Jesus paid! Jesus paid for all your sins! How do you thank Jesus! By telling others about Jesus. Pay it forward! Share Jesus' forgiving love. Jesus has blessed you and me! Thank you, Jesus! Amen!

**To God alone all glory!**

*Rev. Anthony P. Schatz*