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**2-Narrative 03 – Jacob’s Wrestling
Genesis 32:9-13, 22-30; (Mark 14:32-36)**

**22 September 2019
Salem, Bridgeport**

“Wrestling for Blessing”

He sat alone.

Clouds blotted out every star and it was so dark he could barely see his hand in front of his face.

The night was quiet, the stillness broken only by the sound of the river rushing by.

He shivered – not from cold, but from fear.

Tomorrow he might be killed so this might very well be his last night on earth.

He sat there thinking back, pondering, reflecting.

It seemed as if his whole life had been one long wrestling match.

It had begun even before he was born, when he had to share his mother’s womb with a twin.

The bigger brother had beat him out into the world but he had been right behind, right on his heels –
literally, since he came out clutching his brother’s heel in his hand.

That’s how he had gotten his name: Yaacov, Jacob, supplanter, heel.

And he had lived right into that name; he had certainly been a heel.

His brother had been a huge, hairy, manly man – excelling at hunting, gathering and everything outdoors,
while Jacob had been small with smooth skin,

preferring to stay indoors with his mother and the other women, cooking.

The years of teasing, put-downs, and snide remarks had taken their toll.

It was an ongoing wrestling match.

So when Esau wanted a bowl of stew, Jacob hadn’t given a second thought
about asking for Esau’s birthright in return.

Esau, a little low on brain power, had simply given it to him.

The poor stupid man didn’t even realize what he had done for quite a while.

But when he did, he consoled himself:

some day at least he would get his father’s blessing and perhaps that would restore some of his loss.

But when it came time for the blind, sick, dying Isaac to give that blessing,

his wife, Rebekah, had overheard and made a plan for Jacob to get that as well.

Yes, Jacob had been a heel.

He had tricked his twin brother and his dying father.

When Esau discovered this second betrayal, he vowed to kill Jacob once his father had died.

His mother overheard and had Jacob flee to his uncle Laban’s house.

There Jacob set eyes on the most beautiful woman he had ever seen & fell immediately in love.

He asked his uncle for Rachel’s hand in marriage and Laban said,

“Sure! Just work for me for seven years and then you can have her.”

It was a hard bargain but Jacob agreed.

Finally he married his bride and in the morning after the marriage had been consummated,

he lifted the veil from the woman beside him to discover it wasn’t Rachel, but her older, unattractive sister!

He had deceived people and now he had been deceived, but there was nothing he could do about it.

All he could do was work another seven years for Rachel.

He got his vengeance though.

He and his uncle had decided to divide the herds,

so that Jacob would get the speckled and spotted animals, and Laban the plain ones.

That was fine with Laban as there weren’t that many speckled, spotted ones.

But Jacob somehow managed to make sure that the speckled, spotted ones

reproduced at a far greater rate than the others, so eventually he was the one who had more.

It sure seemed like he had spent his life wrestling with people: his brother, his father, and his uncle.

Now he was sitting here by the river, wrestling with God.

On the one hand, he felt that God was calling him to go back home to claim his birthright.

On the other, he was terrified of going back and encountering the brother he had deceived.

He had the birthright and the blessing so when he got home all should be his. That was what God wanted, right?

But were the birthright and the blessing rightfully his?

Maybe they weren't. Maybe it wasn't God's plan, God's desire, God's vision for him to go home;

Maybe it was only what he wanted, what he needed, what he desired.

What was God's will? What did God want of him? What was God's plan for his life?

Something inside him told him to go home and claim his birthright and blessing, but he had doubts.

All night he wrestled.

And when God was ready to depart, Jacob wouldn't let go.

He held onto God until he could get another blessing,

a blessing that would make up for the one he had stolen,

a blessing that would give him direction,

a blessing that would confirm what it was that God wanted him to do.

So God said, "What's your name?"

And Jacob said, "Heel. I'm Jacob. I'm a heel."

And God said, "Not anymore.

You've wrestled with me and because you've held on to me I will give you a new identity.

You are no longer a heel; you are the man who has struggled with God and survived."

Why has the story lasted for 4000 years?

Because it's the story of every one of us, for every one of us has sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.

Every one of us has hurt people.

Every one of us has failed to be that which God desires us to be.

Life is a journey. And God calls each one of us to move forward towards a destination.

But the thing about that destination is that it's a place of both promise and fear.

I don't know what part of your life God wants you to move forward in,

but in every single one of us I believe that there is something which nudges us where we are to go.

Maybe it's a voice in our head that speaks to us and tells us what we are called to do.

Maybe it has to do with our health.

Maybe it has to do with our relationships.

Maybe it has to do with our work.

But in some area of our life, God is calling us toward something better, something bigger, something brighter.

Yet so often we are afraid to strike out for that destination.

We're afraid that we won't have enough time, or enough money, or enough ability to get there.

We're afraid that we will go for it and won't make it,

we're afraid that we'll try to reconcile with someone and it won't work,

and most of all we're afraid that maybe we were wrong,

that maybe it isn't God calling us,

maybe the vision isn't from God maybe it's simply our own needs & desires & wants & imaginations.

So how do we know?

How do we know if it's God who is calling us forward

or just our own needs and desires and wants and imaginations?

We do what Jacob did.

We wrestle with God and try to discern what we are called to do, whether it's God calling us forward or not.

We wrestle as we watch and wait, listen and learn, pray and praise.

And the wrestling is up close and personal.

There are a lot of sports where you don't have to touch the other person.

I can pitch a baseball and you can hit it with a bat and we never have to touch.

But in wrestling you hold on tightly.

To hold on to God, to touch God, we need to worship God with all of that we are –

not just with our minds, but with our hearts and our souls and our bodies, as well.

We need to open our whole selves to the Spirit.

And we need to do that constantly and consistently and continually until we get the blessing we seek.

And we'll know we've got the blessing when all of the doubt and guilt and fear fall away,

when we realize that

no matter what we have done in the past,

no matter what situation we've gotten ourselves into,

no matter what the challenges are, God is able to make a way.

It's not a once and done kind of thing, either; it's an ongoing process.

When I am trying to discern whether something is God's will or whether it's what I want,

I wrestle with God and I hold on until something happens that tells me I'm on the right track.

And then I continue along for a while.

Then maybe I run into obstacles or maybe I start feeling afraid or maybe I start doubting myself,

and I stop. I stop moving forward.

And then I know it's time to wrestle again – to wrestle and to hold on to God

until God once again gives me some sign I'm moving in the right direction

No matter what you have done in the past, no matter who you've hurt, no matter how you've failed,

God is here today to give you a new identity, to give you a new name,

to set you free from everything in your past that is holding you back from being who God wants you to be.

God wants so much more for you than you can ever imagine.

God is calling you forward to that destination.

God wants you to claim your birth right, to claim your blessing.

God has planted in your heart a deep desire for more.

Don't be afraid to go for it.

Don't think that there's not enough time, that there's not enough money, that there's not enough resources.

Don't let your doubts or guilt or fear hold you back.

Hold on to God.

Hold on to God until you get the blessing,

until you get a blessing that sets you free from your past

to move ahead to the amazing future God desires for you.

Let go of fear.

Hold on to God.

And you will be most abundantly blessed. **Amen**