

Reminiscere 2025  
Gen. 32:22-32 (ESV)

“And Jacob’s hip was put out of joint as he wrestled with him. Then he said, ‘Let me go, for the day has broken.’ But Jacob said, ‘I will not let you go unless you bless me.’”

In the name of the Father, and of the + Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

A blessed second Sunday of Lent to all of you, brothers and sisters. Blessings to you. I’ve prepared a sermon, dear ones, that I think may be challenging for some of you to hear, quite frankly, but for others, maybe a whole lot of others, you won’t find it difficult at all. You’ll know exactly what I’m talking about and you’ll find great comfort in it.

It is all too easy for us to imagine that when *life* is easy, when everything is going your way, when everything you touch turns to gold, as it were, well it’s all too easy to think that the Lord simply must be pleased with you. And you couldn’t fathom it being any other way.

And if you knew, on the other hand, that you had sinned and had done some terrible evil you were certain would provoke the Lord to anger, well then you might expect to suffer in some way.

But as it is, when you’re getting along well in life or at least well enough, when your conscience is clean and despite being far from perfect you know you’ve still been faithful to the Lord, trusting His promises—you can’t think of a single reason why you might suddenly find yourself at odds with Him.

All things considered, you simply have no cause to be concerned that you might suddenly find yourself in a state of contention and conflict with none other than God Himself. You couldn’t dream of it. Why would you?

Well, dear ones, that’s all well and good while things are all well and good. But what happens when they’re not?

What happens when you’ve been faithful the best way you know how, but everything is still going wrong no matter what you do?

What happens when you have a clean conscience but you’re still suffering and it’s going from bad to worse, everything you touch turns to ash.

And soon it becomes clear that no one but the Lord Himself can fix the problems you’ve run into, but not only is He not doing that, He also seems completely opposed to you at every turn, heaping more troubles on you, and afflicting you so bitterly? What then? What then?

Well, that gives you a taste of what the ancient patriarch, Jacob, experienced in our Old Testament lesson. It’s what countless other saints have also come to know, and when it’s all said and done, you may just become all too familiar with it yourself.

Our Old Testament lesson picks up in Genesis 32, and when it does, dear ones, to refresh your memory, Jacob had already managed to con his older brother, Esau, out of his birthright as the firstborn son, and this wasn't just some silly family squabble either. Because Esau as the firstborn son was supposed to get, among other things, double the inheritance as anyone else, but now all that was going to his younger brother instead. And if you've ever been around family fighting over their inheritance, well, maybe you understand the kind of problem that was. Maybe that kind of conflict isn't so foreign to you.

Well, in any case, as if that weren't enough when it comes to family drama, Jacob also managed to deceive their father, Isaac, as he prepared for death. The man's eyesight had grown *very* poor with age, and Jacob went so far as to clothe himself with goatskin and was impersonating his hairy older brother at their father's bedside at the end of his life. And the great blessing Isaac intended to give to Esau as the eldest son, that now went to Jacob too!

Well, as you can imagine, Esau was ready to kill his younger brother and he was going to do it—literally—so Jacob had to get out of Dodge. And he goes to live way off with his uncle. And after 20 years go by, the Lord gives Jacob a special command to return to the land he left, the land promised to his fathers.

So, Jacob sets out to come back; he intends to be faithful to the Lord, but in doing so, Jacob gets word that Esau is on his way to meet him, and he's bringing with him 400 grown men.

Jacob fears for his life. Who wouldn't? But think about this for a minute, dear ones. Look at the predicament he's in.

The Lord Himself has commanded Jacob to return. He's also promised Jacob, that He would do him good and prosper his offspring. But now, Jacob obeying the Lord's command and trusting His Word of promise means he's now forced to come face to face with his older brother, who's coming right at him with hundreds of military aged men.

Dear ones, being faithful to the Lord has put Jacob between a rock and a hard place. Some of you know exactly what that's like.

Well, Jacob prays to the Lord, as well he should. And in essence, he says, "O Lord, [it was You] who said to me, 'Return to your country and to your kindred'... Please deliver me from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau, for I fear him, that he may come and attack.

"You said, 'I will surely do you good, and make your offspring as the sand of the sea, which cannot be numbered.'" "You said."

Well after Jacob then sends his family and his livestock on ahead of him in the dead of night and he's left all alone in the darkness, the Lord manifests Himself and appears to Jacob there—but He doesn't rush over to comfort and console him, the Lord doesn't even identify Himself. The Lord appeared, as Luther says, in a form that foreshowed His incarnation. And next

thing he knew, Jacob found himself in a wrestling match with Him, of all things. Jacob found himself locked in a heated, head-to-head struggle with God's pre-Incarnate Son.

Soon, Jacob was worn out and tired, he was covered in sweat and dirt, the Lord even dislocated his hip in the contest and then He was ready to disengage and just leave, but still Jacob clung to Him. Dear ones, like the Canaanite woman in our Gospel text, Jacob simply would not let go until our Lord blessed him.

And *that*, brothers and sisters, *that* is a profound image of faith. That's what it looks like to cling our Lord when the struggle is real, when He tests us with fiery trials, when it's uncomfortable and painful and when faithfulness to Him means facing a crucible, out of which there is no easy way.

And in all this, we also glimpse what Christ our Lord, in the fulness of time, would do for us and for our salvation, in the struggle He endured, clinging in faith to the Father while facing the crucible of His Passion.

Look how Jesus, the true Israel, perfectly faithful to God's commands, perfectly trusting His promises, still wrestled with Him in Gethsemane and in what that followed on from there.

Jesus grew tired and weary in the struggle; He sweat great drops of blood in the contest; and despite all the blows He took and the onslaught He faced in the course of His crucifixion, despite our redemption costing Him His very life on the cross, still He clung in faith to the Father until He blessed Him and Christ emerged from the trial and the tomb victorious.

Dear ones, let these things preach to you today. Let them show you what it looks like to be faithful to the Lord in the day of trouble, when by all accounts it appears as though the Lord Himself is the One Who's taken His stand against you and now wrestling with Him in prayer is the only way to make it through.

You should know that Jacob, for his part, after wrestling with the Lord and being renamed Israel, he went on to meet his brother, Esau, face to face, who ended up coming in peace after all.

But frankly, it didn't really matter, because Israel had the Lord's command and His promise, and by the time he met with his older brother, he had already struggled with One much, much mightier than he, the One Who would go on to conquer death and hell for us. Let it be so with you, too, dear ones.

No matter what you're up against, no matter what you face, step into the arena of prayer and don't turn away from the contest when it comes. Don't shy away from the struggle with the Lord. Like Jacob, cling to Him in faith and don't let go until He blesses you, whether here in this life or in the life to come hereafter.

Because the Lord is faithful to His Word, and through test and trial, through thick and thin, come what may, it's *only* by clinging to Him in faith that you shall obtain His blessing, and truly blessed in Christ our Lord you shall surely be...

To Christ be all the glory forever and ever. Amen.