



1616 W. Mequon Road, Mequon WI 53092

(262)241-3121 www.stjohnsmequon.org

Email: office@stjohnsmequon.org

Pastor James Tiefel

(262) 853-9723 (cell#)

Email: pastortiefel@gmail.com

The Nineteenth Sunday after Pentecost

October 16, 2022

God's Promises Produce Persistence in Prayer

Life is filled with challenges, challenges to daily living and challenges to faith. We can expect those challenges to come our way and we know to take our troubles to the throne of God in prayer. The Lord always listens and he urges us to be persistent in our requests and never lose hope. In his perfect wisdom he may delay his help for a time but our persistent prayers rely on the Lord to bring us to safety. The Bible says, "Pray without ceasing" for a good reason.

Sermon

Genesis 32:22-30

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. After he had sent them across the stream, he sent over all his possessions. So Jacob was left alone, and a man wrestled with him till daybreak. 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. Then the man said, "Let me go, for it is daybreak."

But Jacob replied, "I will not let you go unless you bless me."

The man asked him, "What is your name?" "Jacob," he answered.

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."

Jacob said, "Please tell me your name."

But he replied, "Why do you ask my name?" Then he blessed him there.

So Jacob called the place Peniel, saying, "It is because I saw God face to face, and yet my life was spared."

Introduction – So why did the widow in today's Gospel keep coming back to this judge again and again and again? We don't know exactly, but we have a good idea. She had a big problem; this was more than a neighbor blowing leaves on her lawn. This was a legal problem; maybe it was extortion or fraud. The problem wasn't going away so she had to go to court. She didn't have a husband or a lawyer and the judge was a crook. She was out of options and that's why she kept going back again and again and again.

So why did Jesus tell this parable? Little by little Jesus had been preparing his followers for the time when he would be gone and they would be on their own. Life was going to get rough and Jesus had a clear picture of how rough their lives would be. Life would be a lot worse than having their neighbor's leaves on their lawn. People would oppose Christianity and persecute Christians. Their enemies would savage their homes, steal their belongings, slaughter their families, and throw them in unmarked graves. No armies, no governments, and no judges would help them. Jesus told this parable to urge his followers to **always pray and not give up** because **God would bring about justice for his chosen ones**.

So what do we pray for? Well, we pray for a lot of little things like "Lord, keep my neighbor from blowing leaves on my lawn." We pray before we eat, we pray before we go to bed, we pray the Lord's Prayer. We've prayed all these prayers a thousand times and we don't think about them too much. But have you ever prayed about something really big, maybe something you've never prayed about before? Maybe you pray for the family of a WELS pastor killed in car accident or maybe you pray that God would keep crazy people from driving 70 miles/hour on city streets. Maybe you pray for a child who's become addicted to drugs or alcohol and seems headed for death. Maybe you pray that the doctor is wrong when he says the tests aren't good and you should be looking at Hospice care. And maybe we pray that God would end all the horrible wickedness on earth and come again quickly. There are times in our lives when we figure we're out of options

and God is the only place to go. And that's when our prayers get really serious. And we come back again and again and again.

So why did Jacob pray? He left his family home 20 years before the episode we heard about in Genesis 32 this morning and now he was coming back. He left home alone; he was coming back with two wives, a bunch of kids, and the kind of things rich people had in those days. His brother Esau was waiting for him with 400 soldiers—and Esau hated him with good reason. Jacob was out of options. And so he prayed. But he didn't get down on his knees and he didn't fold his hands. Jacob wrestled with God. He fought with God and he forced God to keep his promises.

This is one of the strangest stories in all of the Bible and we don't understand it all completely. But it teaches us an extremely important truth especially for when we're out of options.

Hold God to His Promises Believe them...Receive them

1. Jacob was a fraternal twin. He and his brother Esau were the only children of Abraham's son Isaac and his wife Rebecca. Jacob was the second-born son, but God had decided that Jacob the second-born son and not Esau the first-born son would carry on the family legacy and the divine promise that went with it. But Jacob was a born schemer and conniver and God's promise wasn't quite enough. He figured he'd give God a little help. He tricked Esau out of his first-born rights even though the first-born rights were already his. He never got over this. God would promise and Jacob would try to help God out. So now he was up against Esau and his army. He remembered God's promises, but he sent some gifts to make Esau happy just in case.

The fateful day would arrive in the morning. He sent his family and his possessions ahead and **Jacob was left alone to pray**. That's when things got strange. The Bible says, **A man wrestled with him till daybreak**. The wrestling partner turned out to be Son of God before he came to earth. It didn't take long for Jacob to figure this out; he knew he was fighting with God.

So what happened? We don't know the details. It makes sense that the encounter began with simple requests. Apparently, God wasn't willing to grant them. The prophet Hosea tells us that Jacob **wept and begged for God's favor**. Still negative. That's when the wrestling started. Jacob actually laid his hands on God; this wasn't a dream or a vision; this was physical. Jacob grappled with God.

So what in the world was going on here? God needed Jacob to get his priorities straightened out. He needed Jacob to cut out the conniving, he needed him to stop trying to help God out, and he needed him to rely on God's promises completely. God wanted Jacob's whole heart. For the long hours of the night the Son of God said No, no, no until Jacob was ready to say Yes, yes, yes. On that wrestling mat Jacob put his faith in the promises of God. He pinned the Son of God to the mat and held him to his promises.

There is some Jacob in all of us. We have heard the blessings of God for as long as we can remember. Our parents taught us, our teachers and pastors taught us, we hear about them in church and Bible class and we read them in our personal devotions. And we believe them. But there is always this little Jacob voice inside us that figures we need to help God keep his promises. We make a real effort to come to church and be friendly to people so God can keep his promise to forgive our sins. We keep our mouths shut about Jesus so God can keep his promise to deliver us from evil. We cheat on a test or hold back on our offerings so God can keep his promise to provide our daily bread. Jesus wants to say to us: Look I don't need your help. Your help just gets in the way. You heard Jesus in the Gospel: **Will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones, who cry out to him day and night? Will he keep putting them off? I tell you he will see that they get justice, and quickly.** Look. You can hold God to all of his promises. **Just believe them.**

2. Did the Son of God really lose this wrestling match with Jacob? God could have put a strangle hold on Jacob with nothing more than a thought. He wanted the wrestling match to end as the sun rose precisely because **no one can see God and live**. But Jacob put a hold on God that God couldn't escape. God is God and he cannot go back on his promises. God must be true to himself. The Bible says, **God is not human, that he should lie, not a human being, that he should change his mind. Does he speak and then not act? Does he promise and not fulfill?**

That long night of wrestling with God changed Jacob's heart. With grunts and groans and pins and pain Jacob sweat away his schemes and tricks. He had no defense and no offense except his faith in the promises of God. He said to God: You promised! And God kept his promise. And then God gave Jacob a new name. **Your name will no longer be Jacob, but Israel, because you have struggled with God and with humans and have overcome.** Jacob threw God's promises in God's face and God threw those promises right back to Jacob.

So what do we pray about? Not every prayer we pray comes with a promise from God. The little poem goes, "God hath not promised skies always blue, flower strewn pathways all the way through. God hath not promised sun without rain, joy without sorrow, peace without pain." And so we end our prayers for blue skies and sunshine by saying "Your will be done." But we can absolutely hold Jesus to the promises he has made. Do your sins make you wonder about your life with God? Jesus promises, **I forgive your sin.** Do you worry about how people treat the Bible in our world? Jesus promises, **My Word will never pass away.** Are you lonely, do you feel worthless sometimes? Jesus promises, **I will be with you always.** Do you wonder if there really is a heaven? Jesus promises, **I have prepared a place for you and I will come back and take you to be with me.** Believe those promises and you will receive those promises. God does not lie.

So keep praying, friends. Pray with the persistence of that widow; pray with the insistence of Jacob. Pray with faith and pray with patience. We can hold God to his promises **for no matter how many promises God has made, they are Yes in Christ.** Amen.