**Wrestling With God**

**Gen. 32:22-32 & Matt. 15:21-28**

Reminiscere – Lent 1 – 03.`3.2022

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Genevieve Gustavson prayed that daughter would be cured of her cancer, thankfully she was. In fact, after her daughter’s last visit to the oncologist, he declared that there was no evidence of cancer anywhere they could find.

Genevieve, was heard to exclaim, “Thank you for all your prayers, our prayers were answered.”

Unfortunately, tomorrow is the funeral for the daughter of Fredonia Finkelstein, age 32 who died of ovarian cancer. Filamena, Fredonia’s daughter was much beloved of all – the number of those praying for her were legion. So, did God ***NOT*** answer the prayers for Filamena?

Nobody would say that. But, why is it that when things do not go the way that we would like them, the way that we requested of God in our prayers, that we claim He did not answer our prayers?

And by the same token, when something we pray for goes as we had hoped, we then claim that God answered our prayers with a miracle?

God ***ALWAYS*** answers our prayer – in ***His time*** – and according to ***His will***. His time is not always according to our schedule. Also, His will does not always mesh with our desires.

With that in mind, I wonder if we ever truly wrestle with God in prayer as happens in these lessons for Reminiscere Sunday. True wrestling with God in prayer is considered even in our introit, in which we ask God to remember. Remember what? Remember your tender mercies. Remember your loving kindnesses. Why? Because they have been from old, and they are the richest blessings we can ever hope to receive.

If we remember back to the beginning and the garden, after Adam and Eve ate the fruit, God did not end their lives immediately. Instead, He promised to send the One who would crush Satan's head.

In our collect for today, we ask God to see that we have no strength, that only in Him are way outwardly and inwardly defended from all our adversities – not only from adversities that may affect the body, but also from all evil of thought, or the evil that may assault and hurt the soul. How often do we see our struggle as one that has eternal consequences, a struggle that is happening not just in our bodies, but to our souls?

When was the last time you truly wrestled with God? This wrestling is not like on TV, nor even like high school or collegiate wrestling. Wrestling with God when we engage God in prayer, praying with such fervency that our entire body is involved. Too often our prayers are quickly thrown at God in the passionate heat of moment. We may desire something from God, but we are too busy to truly commit time, energy, and effort into our prayers – we just do them to get them done and out of the way.

Dearly beloved of God, all your life – your relationships with God and with one another are summed up in the first commandment. We should have no other gods! We understand this to mean that we are to fear, love, and trust and God above all things. God desires us to ***TRUST*** Him fully, and completely.

If such is the case, you will wrestle with God? How?

***“Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David; my daughter is severely oppressed by a demon.” But he did not answer her a word.***

While Jesus did not speak, His silence was an answer. It was a resounding, “NO!” His disciples understood the answer.

***And His disciples came and begged Him, saying, “Send her away, for she is crying out after us.”***

“Jesus, she is persisting! Rabbi, she is following and continuing to cry out. Jesus, she is a nuisance. Do as she requests and send her away for she is crying out after us.”

***He answered, “I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.”***

He was saying, “Yes, I know! I am not deaf! I can hear her. My answer is still the same, I am not going to do as she requests. I have a task that I must accomplish. At this moment, she is not a part of that task.”

**But she came and knelt before him, saying, “Lord, help me.”**

“I know dear Jesus that you have the ability to help me. I know that you have declined to do as I request, but I also know of your great mercy. I will not let go of you, nor of my request to you. Demon possession is not according to your will, so I throw myself before you loving graciousness. Lord, help me.”

**And he answered, “It is not right to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs.”**

Did Jesus hear her? Of course, He did! She is kneeling before Him, maybe clutching at His clothing, maybe even touching His sandalled feet as she is making her impassioned appeal. His answer is, “No!”

In fact, in today’s world, the “woke” crowd would be screaming that this privileged man has belittled this woman, calling her a dog. And immediately, they would have cancelled Him – within seconds of Jesus’ response those hearing it nearby, would have taken up their phone and lit up the 5G network, hashtagging Him #Jesus #misogynist #dog-hater.

With his words, most would think themselves rebuffed in the rudest way possible. Most would walk away dejected and weeping.

But is this any different than what happened in our Old Testament lesson? Jacob is in the process of coming home. But there is a backstory you need to know.

When his brother came home one day hungry, Jacob had some stew he had made, Esau asked for some. But, he would only share it with Esau, the older brother, if Esau gave him his birthright – the privileges of being firstborn. Esau did!
Years later, as his father is nearing death, Jacob heeds his mother’s scheming and by tricking nearly blind Jacob, obtains the blessing intended for Esau, in essence, stealing what he had tricked out of him many years before.

At this, Jacob flees to Laban, his mother’s brother. There he falls in love, but is ultimately tricked into marriage with the older sister. He does marry Rachel, but for fourteen years he works for Laban – the bride price for Leah and Rachel.

His flocks and herds grow, even as Laban continually tricks him into staying longer. Finally, Jacob flees, a wealthy man. But he is a haunted man. Laban pursues and catches up to him. They do make a covenant, so there is peace. But now he is heading toward his homeland, toward Esau – toward the brother whom he had tricked and cheated.

As he draws closer to home what is going through his mind? As he comes near to his brother he is afraid. He has God’s command to go home, and the promise that God would be with him and bless him, but… Jacob’s heart is heavy with fearful anticipation as he draws closer to home – the closer he gets, the greater the weight of his sin against his brother drags upon him.

He wants to trust God. He wants God’s blessing. He wants God to fulfill the promises he had made to him, and to his fathers. In Genesis before our text, earlier in the day, that was his prayer.

After taking his family over the stream he goes back to the other side. Was he physically wrestling with a physical manifestation of God? Or, had Jacob fallen to his knees in prayer, his prayer so fervent that his body was engrossed in the prayer – on his knees, hands folded together so tightly his hands hurt? Maybe rocking his body back and forth? He was wrestling with God!

Jesus prayed in this manner in the Garden of Gethsemane – praying with His entire body so that His sweat bled.

 Was Jacob’s prayer the same prayer as earlier? ***“O God of my father Abraham and God of my father Isaac, O Lord who said to me, ‘Return to your country and to your kindred, that I may do you good,’ I am not worthy of the least of all the deeds of steadfast love and all the faithfulness that you have shown to your servant, for with only my staff I crossed this Jordan, and now I have become two camps. Please deliver me from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau, for I fear him, that he may come and attack me, the mothers with the children. But you said, ‘I will surely do you good, and make your offspring as the sand of the sea, which cannot be numbered for multitude.’”***

His prayer was so fervent that He would not release God from the promise He had made.

Wrestling with God is an unwillingness to release Him from your grasp until He delivers what He has promised, knowing that even the least of His promises grants great things.

Wrestling with God, unwilling to release Him without Him fulfilling His gracious, merciful, loving-kindness? ***“Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table.”***

The prayers of both Jacob and the Canaanite woman are requesting nothing more than God to keep His promises. Begging God to keep His promises especially over the enemies that would keep us from eternal blessings.

Do you wrestle with God? Do raise your prayers to Him with the same zeal and fervor as if you were wrestling with Him?

“Lord, I do not deserve your grace or your mercy toward me, but I have come here today to receive Your promised grace! I know what I deserve! Do not give to me what I deserve, for your eternal wrath terrifies me. Give me as You have promised! Fulfill what You, in Your loving-kindness have declared. Grant me strength in this life to endure in the face of overwhelming odds and anxious enemies. Fill me with Your forgiveness. Grant me to feast at Your Son’s table, feeding me so that I might receive Your salvation and be strengthened to life everlasting.”

When we wrestle with God in fervency, refusing to let Him go until He grants to us the fulfillment of His promises, He will always answer, “Great is your faith, let it be done for you as you desire.” In the name of Jesus. Amen.