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St. Paul's Lutheran Church
2100 16th Street SW
Austin, MN 55912-1749

Pastor Ted Barthels
Sermon preached on
October 20, 2013
22nd Sunday after Pentecost

Scripture Lessons:; 2 Timothy 3:14-4:5; Luke 18:1-8a
Hymns: 456; 457; 310; 309

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

Sermon Text: Genesis 32:22-30

22 And he arose that night and took his two wives, his two female servants, and his eleven sons, and crossed over the ford of Jabbok. 23 He took them, sent them over the brook, and sent over what he had. 24 Then Jacob was left alone; and a Man wrestled with him until the breaking of day. 25 Now when He saw that He did not prevail against him, He touched the socket of his hip; and the socket of Jacob's hip was out of joint as He wrestled with him. 26 And He said, "Let Me go, for the day breaks." But he said, "I will not let You go unless You bless me!" 27 So He said to him, "What is your name?" He said, "Jacob." 28 And He said, "Your name shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel; for you have struggled with God and with men, and have prevailed." 29 Then Jacob asked, saying, "Tell me Your name, I pray." And He said, "Why is it that you ask about My name?" And He blessed him there.

30 So Jacob called the name of the place Peniel: "For I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved." (NKJV)

This is the Word of God!

Sanctify us, oh Lord, through Your truth. Your Word is truth.
Amen.

In Christ Jesus, dear fellow Redeemed.

INTRO: Desperation

It is another of those feelings that comes with the human experience in this life. As children of God we are not to despair, we are not to lose faith that the Lord is still in control of both the events in our individual lives, on the small scale, as well as the events in the entire world. We should not despair, and yet there are those times when we may feel a bit desperate because we don't know what to do next, how we should address a problem or multiple problems in our lives. We feel more than a bit out of control. In the world many come to the conclusion that this means the world is in chaos, or at least the events of their own lives have no course or direction. For the child of God we learn to face a challenge, that of

THEME: Coming to Grips with God's Will for Us.

God is able to turn the events in our lives to serve for our good and blessing, even when we with our foolish behavior bring trouble into our own lives. That is the first lesson which we learn from Jacob in our text. He found himself in a desperate situation, and one which he did indeed bring upon himself with his conniving treachery twenty years earlier in his life. In the situation in which he found himself he realized it was time to turn to the Lord –

I. Holding Fast to the Promises of God.

That began with letting go of self-reliance.

Jacob had to realize that his natural way of doing things wasn't working in his life. He was named Jacob because he grabbed Esau's heel as the twins were being born. That action at his birth characterized his life. The name Jacob means the Usurper. That was of his way of manipulating people and situations to get all that he wanted out of life.

There at the River Jabbok he was faced with the very real prospect of losing it all. Things were out of his control. Yes, Jacob did what he could do to appease his brother's wrath and hatred. He sent ahead a stream of gifts as peace offerings. He divided his family so

that if Esau actually attacked with his four hundred mounted men, at least some would have a chance to escape. These actions couldn't bring Jacob peace of mind. He was filled with feelings of desperation.

Jacob stayed behind after sending the rest of his family and possessions across the river. He stayed behind but he wasn't alone. It was time for Jacob to learn one life's greatest lessons for the child of God. We are not to be self-reliant. We are to learn to rely upon our God! God is faithful!

When we turn to God we are find Security in the Promises of God. God's Promises to Jacob were promises according to the Lord's grace. They were not awarded to Jacob because of the exemplary life which he lived. Jacob had seen the birthright and the blessing of the older son as something to be taken by trickery. At best he saw God as needing Jacob and his mother Rebecca's assistance to accomplish the end which God Himself had determined according to His grace. That only made trouble in Jacob's life so that he had to flee from Esau's wrath. In spite of that sinful meddling God came to Jacob in a dream at the place Jacob named Bethel.

Genesis 28:12-15 Then he dreamed, and behold, a ladder was set up on the earth, and its top reached to heaven; and there the angels of God were ascending and descending on it. 13 And behold, the Lord stood above it and said: "I am the Lord God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac; the land on which you lie I will give to you and your descendants. 14 Also your descendants shall be as the dust of the earth; you shall spread abroad to the west and the east, to the north and the south; and in you and in your seed all the families of the earth shall be blessed. 15 Behold, I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land; for I will not leave you until I have done what I have spoken to you."

All the blessings which Jacob had plotted and connived to get on his own were not his because he stole them. They could only be his when God gave them to him. There at Bethel, as part of that dream of the ladder to heaven, the Lord, who is gracious to save, imparted all these blessings to an unworthy sinner named Jacob. He promised him the land as an inheritance for his descendants. He

promised Jacob that his descendants would be as the dust of the earth. Then also the greatest blessing, that it was through Jacob that the Savior's line would continue, "**In you and in your seed all the families of the earth shall be blessed.**" With that blessing the Lord promised Jacob that He would be with him, and that the Lord would keep Jacob safe and secure and bring him back to the promised land, "**for I will not leave you until I have done what I have spoken to you.**" Those words and promises of God brought security to Jacob's life in the face of danger, even when Jacob faced the wrath of Esau who was fast approaching with a force of 400 men mounted on horses. God directed events so that Esau, whatever his original intention may have been, came to Jacob in peace. The will of God for salvation was done.

This lesson isn't only applicable to Jacob. It remains true for us yet today. The promises of the Lord are sure, whether these promises be found in the Old Testament or the New. We also should lay hold of God's promises for us as His children. The gracious promises of God toward us as we face distress in life are so numerous we can only present a small sampling, and yet what wondrous comfort the Lord holds out to us poor miserable sinners that we are! In Isaiah we read this promise:

Isaiah 41:10 "Fear not, for I am with you. Be not dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, Yes, I will help you, I will uphold you with My righteous right hand."

Who is that righteous right hand of God but our Lord Jesus Himself who cares for us in our need. Jesus confirmed this promise with His own words:

Matthew 28:20 "Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

Add to that a couple of the promises Paul brought us by inspiration that comfort us in our every need. As we turn to Romans chapter eight we find one promising assurance after another. That marvelous chapter of gospel grace begins with the assurance

Romans 8:1 "There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus."

When problems and distress arise in our lives it is not because God is angry with us and punishing us. He does not deal with us according to our sin but rather according to His grace.

Later in that chapter we have this promise:

Romans 8:28-30 And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose. 29 For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. 30 Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified.

No matter what assails us in life, no matter what trouble we face we are safe and secure with the Lord. We are safe unto eternal life. All things that come our way are used by the Lord for our eternal good. Yes that includes, as it did with Jacob, when we in our foolishness and our sin bring trouble upon ourselves. God does not forsake us in our need. Indeed, the promises at the end of that chapter of Romans reminds us:

Romans 8:31-32 “If God is for us, who can be against us? 32 He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?”

We continue to learn from Jacob’s example regarding the will of God in our lives. Yes, Jacob felt distressed, and so he remained alone on the other side of the river from his family and servants and spent the night –

II. Wrestling with God in Prayer.

Of course, this was a unique event in the history of the world. The Son of God presented Himself in a human form before Jacob, and they commenced to wrestle! How that began I can’t even imagine. The lessons there for us are numerous. In the end what was Jacob seeking but the Lord’s blessing upon his life! Jacob didn’t seek the death of Esau. He prayed that the Lord bless him in the hours and days that lay ahead. Those hours and days were filled with

uncertainty for Jacob, but with the Lord's blessing he was set to face those days and all that they might bring.

We are also learning about **Persistence in Prayer**.

Jacob would not let go of the Lord, even when the Lord afflicted him with a dislocated and damaged hip. Jacob would carry that reminder of this struggle with the Lord with him to the grave. From that day on he would be lame. But shouldn't be seen as an affliction; it was a blessed reminder of God's presence in the day of trouble. Jacob had indeed taken hold of the promises of God and would not let go as he addressed the Lord in his day of trouble.

And so we are also encouraged by the Lord:

Psalm 50:15 "Call upon Me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify Me."

We need to take hold of those promises of God we have already considered and with the firm grasp of faith, "**come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need**" (Hebrews 4:16).

In our gospel lesson Jesus made a strong point about persistence in prayer. We need to pray, and pray, and pray some more and **not give up**. We need to wrestle with the Lord in prayer, and we shall receive the blessing we need for our lives. We trust the Lord not to give us everything our heart desires. No, for then we would be subject to much folly. We trust the Lord to bless us, and bring us what He knows to be for our good as we serve Him in this life and as we look for that life which is to come.

Our prayers are not the acts of desperation, even when offered in times of great distress because we know that the Lord cares for us. That is exactly what Peter teaches us about prayer.

1 Peter 5:6-7 "Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time, 7 casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you."

And prayer is not an exercise in futility because God will do whatever He wants anyway whether I pray or not. That is not the case at all. He wants to hear our prayers. He waits for our prayers. He tells us in the epistle of James: “**You do not have because you do not ask**” (James 4:2).

We are also assured by James, “**The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much**” (James 5:16).

Our prayers make a difference because the Lord wants it that way. He wants us to pray, to rely upon Him. He promises to hear our prayers, and even more wondrous that that, He promises to act upon our prayers that are offered in Jesus’ name. Of course we as children of God always submit to the will of God, for the will of God is good. Ultimately that is the lesson we learn from this event in Jacob’s life, **coming to grips with God’s will for us!** As we do this we will only be finding ourselves --

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Conclusion: Marveling at the Lord’s grace in our lives.

When this incident in Jacob’s life was over, just as soon as it was over, that was the lesson Jacob drew from this incident. It was the Lord who was struggling with him all night. That was the Lord who could have consumed him in His holiness. Jacob marveled, “**I have seen the Lord and I live!**”

That was the Lord’s way of communicating His grace to Jacob assuring Jacob, and all of us as well, that the Lord is not bent upon our destruction, but even through the struggles of life is only desiring our good and blessing. He is present with us and has revealed Himself to us in Christ Jesus. By faith we also have seen the Lord and we live.

AMEN.

And the peace of God which passes all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.