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

Pastor Ted Barthels
Sermon preached on
April 27, 2014
1st Sunday after Easter

Scripture Lessons: 1 Peter 1:22-25, John 21:15-24
Hymns: 201; 196; 192:1,5-8; 205 (195:1,4 – Gloria)

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

Sermon Text: Genesis 32:22-31

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." 31 Just as he crossed over Peniel the sun rose on him, and he limped on his hip.

(NKJV)

This is the Word of God!

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

In Christ Jesus, our Crucified and Risen Savior, dear fellow Redeemed.

INTRO: Facing a Crises

The period immediately after the resurrection was a critical time in the lives of the apostles. They all must have had questions on their minds about what the future held for them, and what all this meant for their relationship with the Lord, and how it would impact their lives. Surely Peter was facing the greatest perplexity for his denial of the Lord must have weighed heavily upon his heart. In our gospel lesson we read of how the Lord dealt with Peter in love and grace, restoring Peter to apostleship, revealing for Peter the direction of his life as a life of ministry that would end in martyrdom.

Certainly Peter was far from the first child of God who faced a crisis in life that was also a crisis of faith, a time when the Lord's presence in life needed to be felt, and blessing and direction be given. In our text we hear of how one of the patriarchs had the abiding presence of the Lord revealed in his life, that we also might comprehend the power of a risen and everliving Lord in our lives.

At the tomb that early Easter morning Mary Magdaline was told by Jesus that she should **not** cling to Him because He had not yet ascended to His Father. Now He has ascended to the throne of God, and so as we face the challenges of life we ought to face them –

THEME: Clinging by Faith to a living Savior.

In our text Jacob was confronted with the most difficult circumstances in his life. In his hour of desperate need we read of Jacob --

I. Clinging to Our Living Savior for a Blessed Life.

Jacob had taken all the precautions he could think of to try to keep at least some of his family safe from Esau and his armed marauders. Jacob knew that Esau resented him, and had threatened to kill him. He feared his twin brother, and knew that he had no power to stand up against his brother. Jacob decided to spend the night alone, and yet he was not alone.

A Man appeared, and they wrestled. They wrestled all night. That had to be the strangest night in Jacob's life, but it was the Lord's way to communicate His presence with Jacob, and by inspiration of the Holy Spirit to bring that communication to us also.

There are times when God forces the issue. He demands that we take hold of Him, and struggle with Him. He wrestled with Jacob so that Jacob would take hold of the Lord and not let go, for we know as it is revealed for us in our text, that this was not just a Man that happened to stumble into Jacob's camp that night and they ended up wrestling through the night. This Man was the Son of

God who appeared in the form of a man, not as true man as He would when Jesus came into the world, but in the form of a man, so that Jacob could take hold of Him and cling to Him, and hold on tight all the night long.

The struggle that Jacob was having with his life and the danger that he faced, and the peril that he feared would befall his family, was now something he was taking to the Lord, and by clinging to the Lord, Jacob would be blessed.

Genesis 32:25-29 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.

The struggle became more difficult for Jacob after the Lord dislocated Jacob's hip, but Jacob still would not let go. He continued to hold on to the Lord as day began to break and the Lord said, "**Let Me go for day breaks.**" Jacob persistently called for the Lord's blessing in this his hour of need. And in the end we read, "**And He blessed him there!**"

Do we understand the lesson before us? Even though the Son of God had not yet become incarnate, had not yet suffered and died and rose again, He appeared in a

human form to Jacob that Jacob might cling to the Lord in his hour of need. Jacob got the message. He received the answer of the Lord. The Lord not only changed Jacob's name to Israel to signify the conflict Jacob had endured his life, but also the Lord blessed Jacob and kept Jacob and his family safe, not only the next day when Esau arrived with his band of men, but throughout Jacob's life and beyond, for **God is faithful**. The Lord cares for His children, and wants us to turn to Him in time of need.

Now we know Jesus as the Son of God incarnate, who came into the world to be our brother, and who lived and died and rose again for us and for our salvation. He lives forevermore, so that we also might cling to Him by faith. In our hour of need the Lord is there with us. We need only turn to Him and take hold of Him, and not let go until He blesses us.

II. There is a Role for Affliction in the Christian's Life.

It was right in the middle of this all night struggle that the Lord touched Jacob's hip and dislocated his hip, permanently by the way.

It would appear that Jacob's situation was only made more desperate by wrestling with the Lord. Without doubt his grip on the Lord was being tested. Would Jacob let go? Or, would he cling to the Lord even tighter? We know the result. Jacob tightened his grip on the Lord and he wouldn't let go. He needed the Lord all the more, and cried out for the Lord's blessing upon his life.

When things are going along smoothly in life we are apt to be rather casual about our grip on the Lord. We take

our faith for granted, we take the Lord's presence in our lives for granted. It is when we face a crises in life that our focus on the Lord is sharpened. We pray to the Lord, but we may still remain quite self-sufficient. At times the Lord touches us again, even when we are already dealing with difficulty or grief. Then how shall we respond? In the world we hear about those who curse God, as **Job was advised to do by his wife, that he should curse God and die.** That is giving up on the Lord.

However, like Job, **we know that our Redeemer lives!** Like Job, we have been blessed with faith in a living Lord who gave Himself for us to redeem us from sin. Like Jacob we know that we should put our trust in the Lord and hold on tight, clinging to Him and seeking His blessing upon our life. Like Mary Magdalene, we should desire to hold onto the Lord, and know that He who has gone before us into heaven intercedes for us there before the throne of God, so that we may boldly come before Him and seek grace to help in time of need.

And yes, the Lord does use affliction to strengthen our grip on Him, so that we depend on Him instead of our own resources and our own resilience or strength. Paul also had this lesson applied to his life, as he explains in second Corinthians:

2 Corinthians 12:7-10 And lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I be exalted above measure. 8 Concerning this thing I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me. 9 And He said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness." Therefore most gladly I will rather

boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. 10 Therefore I take **pleasure** in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

Paul didn't want this "**thorn in the flesh.**" He didn't enjoy it, but he learned from it. He prayed about time and again, and yet the Lord said, "**No,**" He would not remove this affliction, even though the devil found it useful to tempt and assault Paul in his life. The lesson is important, God's **grace** is there for us in all our afflictions, yes even in our **afflictions**. When we are weak we appreciate and comprehend the Lord's strength and presence in our lives. So then, when problems arise and we are distressed for Christ's sake, let us lay hold of the Lord our Risen and everliving Lord, who is a real and living presence in our lives, and not let go until He blesses us! **And He shall bless us!**

In this life we shall have afflictions, and tribulations, and persecutions, and challenges of many types, but what is the result?

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III. What a Blessing To know the Lord

When the night was over Jacob realized just how blessed he was!

Genesis 32: 30-31 So Jacob called the name of the place Peniel: "For I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved." 31 Just as he crossed over Penuel the sun rose on him, and he limped on his hip.

He saw God face to face. He realized that he had been blessed to be in the presence of the Lord, and that it was

the Lord who had grappled with Jacob, testing his faith. He had the most intimate connection with the Lord through this night of trial. **Jacob realized that the fact that he was still alive after being in the presence of the Lord was an amazing act of God's grace.** He would remember that place for the wonder of grace that had come to him there, naming the place "the face of God." God left Jacob with a permanent reminder of that night, for the muscle in Jacob's hip was shriveled up, and Jacob would have that limp for the rest of his earthly sojourn.

How blessed we are to know the Lord! We have not seen the Lord with our physical eyes, just as we have not wrestled with the Lord in a physical wrestling match, but the Lord has visited us with His grace. He has made His presence known to us in our hearts AND in our lives. Knowing Jesus as our **living Lord**, the Lord assures us that He is an active power in each and every one of our lives. He knows us personally, and cares for us personally, just as He did for Jacob, or Paul, or Peter, or Mary Magdalene. He assures us all:

Isaiah 43:1 "Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by your name; You are Mine."

What a blessing it is for us to know the Lord as our Living Savior, and better still that we are known to Him, and He cares for us in all our ways.

AMEN.

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