



TOUCH POINT

Limping Along – Touchpoint for October 12, 2022

Genesis 32:22-31 (NIV) Jacob Wrestles With God ... ²² 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. ²³ After he had sent them across the stream, he sent over all his possessions. ²⁴ So Jacob was left alone, and a man wrestled with him till daybreak.

²⁵ 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. ²⁶ Then the man said, "Let me go, for it is daybreak." But Jacob replied, "I will not let you go unless you bless me." ²⁷ The man asked him, "What is your name?" "Jacob," he answered. ²⁸ 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."

²⁹ Jacob said, "Please tell me your name." But he replied, "Why do you ask my name?" Then he blessed him there. ³⁰ So Jacob called the place Peniel, saying, "It is because I saw God face to face, and yet my life was spared." ³¹ The sun rose above him as he passed Peniel, and he was limping because of his hip.

Grace and Peace from the Mystery in whom we live and move and have our being.

*"The sun rose above him as he passed Peniel,
and he was limping because of his hip."*

It is a 3am story on steroids. We are all familiar with that time of day. When all the fears from the past, and all the worries about the future, gather together like a wolf outside our door.

And it wasn't like Jacob didn't have a lot to fear. He was meeting his older brother for the first time since stealing Esau's birthright by deceiving their father, Isaac. Death was a very real possibility. And his two wives and two maids who together produced his 11 children... well, they were gained through deception as well. By the way, if you think it's wise to teach your children the biblical concepts of sex and marriage, I suggest you read the story of Jacob and Laban and Leah and Rachel and Zilpah and Bilhah. It makes General Hospital look like "Leave it to Beaver" and Eddie Haskell look like Opie Taylor. OK, I really dated myself on that one.

There's plenty of things in Jacob's past and in Jacob's future to fear, but that is not what he is wrestling with this night – this 3am.

This night, he is wrestling with God, or at least an angel of God. Which I find quite interesting, because isn't God supposed to be comforting? Isn't life with God supposed to be peaceful?

I mean, there is truth in that. There is a peace that passes all understanding. There is a comfort that cannot be gained from the world.

But there is also this other side, this conflict side. After all, the major symbol of Christianity is a cross, which is not exactly a symbol of peace and comfort, but an instrument of torture, and battle, and struggle.

We didn't, after all, crucify Jesus because he brought us too much peace and comfort. And when Jesus talks about dying to self, it's not exactly something we embrace.

So I want to wade into this idea of wrestling with God, but not too deep – because who wants to come out walking with a limp?

Now, I'm not sure when it happened. But somewhere in the last few years I began to see that thinking of my faith as simply a binky, simply a pacifier to placate where I am at in life, or my place in society, wasn't bringing the peace I was expecting.

And strangely, I found that I grew the more I was challenged. And I found the more I was disturbed by Bible passages, the more I entered into a different kind of peace.

And then one day I realized I wasn't alone. It happened about five years ago. I had given a Touchpoint here on a Wednesday. But it had been a busy week leading up to it. I had been in the process of moving and had family in town, and well, you know, I was busy. So I pulled out an old sermon from 25 years earlier, made no changes, and delivered it. I asked a good friend of mine afterwards for feedback and he said, "It was a nice Touchpoint. Nothing wrong with it." And then he added, "But..."

Uh oh, this isn't going to be good...

He continued, "But I drove by five or six churches on the way up here where I could have heard that same message. And that is not why I come up here."

OUCH!!!

And I thought to myself, "I'm never asking him for feedback again."

And then he said this, which has changed not only my way of preparing these Touchpoints, but how I read the Bible: He added, "I want you to wrestle with the passage. And I want to hear about your wrestling. Don't wrestle in private. Show me your struggles, so I can wrestle with the passage as well."

I was blown away, because this person had been through some serious struggles and wrestling in his life. And he wanted more struggles?!

But he wanted to wrestle with healthy things. He wasn't looking for his faith to be his pacifier, but to transform and change him – to bring about a death and resurrection.

He wanted his 3am wrestling not to be with his past or his future. Not with his demons, but with the Mystery who can bring about healing and restoration – transformation and resurrection.

I now ask him for feedback every chance I get. Though I should probably ask him for advice ahead of time. But knowing him, he would probably just say, "Go wrestle with it yourself. It's the only way you're going to grow."

Man, I hate it when those I'm supposed to be a spiritual director for... lead the way for me!

"Hey Jim, you're supposed to be leading us THIS way!"

"OK. Thanks. Wait for me and I'll catch up! Remember, I'm your leader!"

...And it wasn't long after that, I was in a group discussion over a controversial topic going on in the church. I quoted Jesus from time to time in the conversation because, well, I thought that might be appropriate seeing as how we were in a Christian church and I was a faith mentor. Without going into too much detail, a few days after the discussion I received a letter from someone telling me they didn't appreciate "...having Jesus thrown in my face."

Now, I didn't write them back because it would have been a never-ending conversation, but if I had, I probably would have said, "No one likes having Jesus thrown in their face. That's why we crucified him. Do you think I like being told to love my enemies and pray for those who persecute me? Do you think I like being told to turn the other cheek? Or to forgive 7x70? Or if I have two coats, to give one away? Maybe

Jesus just meant if you have two casual coats, give one away. Or if you have two formal coats, give one away. Certainly he would allow us to have a coat for each setting!”

When one encounters the Christ – when one encounters the Mystery – one can never walk away the same. Something is always thrown out of joint.

Christ is not just a binky to make us feel comfortable in our station in life.

In encountering the Christ, something dies and something rises. At the very least, something gets thrown out of joint, as with Jacob.

And we can never walk the same again ... and again ... and again. Because the wrestling never stops.

And we all walk with limps. Whether it is from wrestling with God or wrestling with life.

We all carry with us the marks and scars of life. Heck, even the Christ still carries the wounds of wrestling with God and humanity in his resurrected form! Why should we be any different? But those scars, those wounds of Christ, send us the same message that God spoke to Jacob, now given the name Israel: That the Mystery is with us in all of our travels, all of our struggles and limping through life. And that the sun will also rise upon us.

“The sun rose above him as he passed Peniel, and he was limping because of his hip.”

You know, if I ever started another church, maybe I would name it the “World Wrestling Federation Lutheran Church.” And my benediction every Sunday would be, “Let’s get ready to Rumble!!!”

Because... Can it be that woundedness can lead to newness of life? Can it be that wrestling can lead to peace?

Can it be that one never walks taller than while walking with a limp?

Or that the sun will also rise on us as we learn to walk with a limp?

“The sun rose above him as he passed Peniel, and he was limping because of his hip.”

The story of Jacob wrestling with God seems to say so. So does the risen Christ with his wounded hands and feet.

And of course, so does his meal.

“In the night in which he was betrayed...”

Oh, I think there was some wrestling going on that night, don’t you? Between Jesus and his disciples, between Jesus and his Father in the Garden of Gethsemane. There was more than enough wrestling and woundedness this night.

And yet, as my dear friend Henry Rojas likes to say, “In the communion meal, broken meets broken.” Or to put it into today’s Bible passage terms, ‘wounded meets wounded’ or ‘limping meets limping.’

So can it be that woundedness can lead to newness of life? Can it be that wrestling can lead to peace?

Can it be that one never walks taller than while walking with a limp?

Or that the sun will also rise on us as we learn to walk with a limp?

“The sun rose above him as he passed Peniel, and he was limping because of his hip.”

The story of Jacob wrestling with God seems to say so. So does the risen Christ with his wounded hands and feet.

And of course, so does his meal. Where the “**Son**” rises upon us even in our brokenness.

Amen.

Spirit in the Desert

Opening Song

Be Still

(London Fox Taize Choir)

Be Still, know that I am God.

Create in Me

(The Concordia Choir)

Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from thy presence and take not the holy Spirit from me. Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation and uphold me with thy free spirit.

Bible Passage

(A passage takes us from one place to another)

Touchpoint

(Where God's story touches our life story)

In the Arms of God

(Tony Alonso, Marty Haugen, Michael Joncas)

Refrain: Come and rest in the arms of God. Leave your worry and fear. Make your home in the heart of God. God will dry every tear. For the burden you carry will fade within God's care.
Come and rest in the arms of God.

1) Gentle is God's way and humble is God's heart. God's love will light the way that leads to peace. Surely you shall see God's goodness and God's grace. Rest now in God's embrace.

Refrain

2) Do not be afraid. God heals the broken heart. Through grief and disbelief God still remains. God and God alone will be your soul's true rest. Fall in the arms of God.

Refrain

3) You are not alone, for God is always near. Come place your doubt and fear within God's care. God will give you rest, and soothe your weary soul. Dwell in the heart of God.

Refrain

The Meal

The Lord's Prayer

(Robert Stone, The Cambridge Singers, John Rutter)

Benediction

A Celtic Blessing

(Margaret Rizza)

The guarding of the God of Life be on you, the guarding of loving Christ be on you, the guarding of the Holy Spirit be on you, to aid and uphold you each day and night of your life.
The guarding of God, the guarding of Christ, the guarding of the Spirit be upon you.