

July 3, 2022
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Free, But Costly Grace
White Rock United Methodist Church

Genesis 32:22—33:4 (Common English Bible)

Jacob got up during the night, took his two wives, his two women servants, and his eleven sons, and crossed the Jabbok River's shallow water. He took them and everything that belonged to him, and he helped them cross the river. But Jacob stayed apart by himself, and a man wrestled with him until dawn broke. When the man saw that he couldn't defeat Jacob, he grabbed Jacob's thigh and tore a muscle in Jacob's thigh as he wrestled with him. The man said, "Let me go because the dawn is breaking."

But Jacob said, "I won't let you go until you bless me."

He said to Jacob, "What's your name?" and he said, "Jacob." Then he said, "Your name won't be Jacob any longer, but Israel, because you struggled with God and with men and won."

Jacob also asked and said, "Tell me your name."

But he said, "Why do you ask for my name?" and he blessed Jacob there. Jacob named the place Peniel, "because I've seen God face-to-face, and my life has been saved." The sun rose as Jacob passed Peniel, limping because of his thigh. Therefore, Israelites don't eat the tendon attached to the thigh muscle to this day, because he grabbed Jacob's thigh muscle at the tendon.

Jacob looked up and saw Esau approaching with four hundred men. Jacob divided the children among Leah, Rachel, and the two women servants. He put the servants and their children first, Leah and her children after them, and Rachel and Joseph last. He himself went in front of them and bowed to the ground seven times as he was approaching his brother. But Esau ran to meet him, threw his arms around his neck, kissed him, and they wept.

What a joy it is to stand before you today as your pastor. It is an honor and a privilege and I don't take it lightly. I am so excited to be here and I cannot wait to learn more about each one of you and to learn about all that God is doing in and through your lives. Thank you for praying for me, please don't stop.

Today we start chapter 5 in our year-long Unfold series. Grace, grace, God's grace, grace that will pardon and cleanse within; grace, grace, God's grace, grace that is greater than all our sin (UMH 365)! Free but costly grace.

Anne Lamott says, "I do not at all understand the mystery of grace – only that it meets us where we are but doesn't leave us where it found us." (SLIDE)

I have always loved the story of Genesis 32 where Jacob wrestles with the man/angel/God. Do you remember Jacob? He stole his brother Esau's birthright. Esau was the first born and his birthright was to receive his family's land and property. Esau was really hairy and Jacob tricks his nearly blind dad Isaac by wearing goat fur so he can receive his dad's blessing and Esau's birthright. Jacob has to leave because Esau says he is going to kill his brother, then Jacob meets Rachel but ends up marrying Leah and Rachel too. The Bible is so exciting!

20 years pass. Jacob decided to return back home and he is very nervous about seeing his brother again. Jacob sends some messengers ahead of him to tell his brother that he is coming, and the messengers return saying that Esau has 400 men and they are

on their way. Jacob is terrified and he divides all the people that are with him and all of the livestock into two camps thinking that if Esau and the 400 men destroy one camp then the other camp will escape. Jacob sends a present ahead to Esau, 220 goats, 220 sheep, 30 camels, 40 cows and 10 bulls, 30 donkeys. Jacob thought that he could appease his brother's anger with the presents that he sent ahead of him.

So, Jacob takes his 2 wives, his 2 maids, his 11 children and everything he has and sends them across the stream. Jacob is alone knowing that tomorrow he will see his brother again. His brother that he cheated, his brother that he stole from, his brother that hated him. That night a man wrestles with Jacob until daybreak. In the book of Hosea the writer says Jacob wrestled an angel. Jacob says that he saw God face to face, so it could have been God that night. So, Jacob and this man or angel or God are wrestling and Jacob demands a blessing. And Jacob is renamed Israel which means one who struggles with God. The story ends with Esau running to meet Jacob, embracing him, falling on his neck and kissing him as they wept. They forgave each other!

Now you might wonder why I love that story so much. I love that story because I love that Jacob wrestles with the man/God/angel. We like to wrestle with God. We like to go our own way, we like to pretend that we can do life all on our own, thank you very much. Until we are at a crossroads in our life and we don't know what is going to happen next. After wrestling with the man/angel/God all night long, Jacob limped. Jacob was affected by that experience. I think of the things that have happened in my life to make me who I am. My parent's divorce when I was 2 or my stepdad's tragic death when I was 17, and through those experiences and so many more I have wrestled with God. Jacob demands a blessing from God and he receives a new name as one who struggles with God. What is in a name anyway? Your name is your identity, it tells you who you are. When I was 12 years old I received as a present one of those things that tells you the meaning of your name and it said "Kerry... Darkness." A few months later I received another name thing present and it said "Lover of Light." I liked "Lover of Light" a lot more.

Jacob's new name of Israel is a reminder of his struggle and the positive outcome from that struggle. What we believe our name means is probably a lot more important than what a sign maker says it is. Our name means that we are cherished, called by our God.

Jacob did some horrible things in his life. But he didn't give up on himself, he didn't give up on his family, he didn't give up on love, and he didn't give up on God. He was able to accept that he was lovable. And he claimed that love, he claimed God's love, God's grace. When he wrestled with the man/God/angel, he knew that he was a beloved child of God and that he was worthy of God's love, grace, and blessing. Yes, he

struggled, with his family, with his work, with God, but through that struggling he remembered that God loved him, from the very beginning. We are God's beloved children. God loves each one of us so much.

I love the Olympics. When the Olympics was in Rio de Janeiro at the Olympic opening ceremony they gave out this new award, the Olympic Laurel award to Kip Keino. **(SLIDE)** Kip won a gold medal in 1968 and in 1972 **(SLIDE)** and then he returned to Kenya and opened an orphanage. Kip said, "We came into this world with nothing and we will leave this world with nothing." So in the time that we are alive, he asked us all to support all the youth of this world to get the basics of humanity: food, shelter and education. He said education not only empowers our youth to be better citizens and leaders of the future, but it also helps them make a positive change and a mighty difference. Watching those Opening Ceremonies I took away that we need to take better care of the planet and take better care of each other. They showed 200 white kites, those kites were taken to Kenya and given to children who had never played with kites before. The children in Kenya wrote messages of peace on them, and sent them back to Brazil to be flown by children there.

The medieval mystic, **Saint Teresa of Avila said, "As I see it, we shall never succeed in knowing ourselves unless we seek to know God."** **(SLIDE)** Crises have a way of helping us discover who God is and who we are. It is those times when I have felt like a disappointment or a failure, those tough times in my life, that reveal who God is and who I am. It was for Jacob. He was able to see all of the ways that God had blessed him and showered him with love and grace his whole life long. Jacob needed a crisis, a wrestling match with the man/God/angel to help him see this but he did.

In Jacob's wrestling match, he finally received grace, undeserved grace, and knew what grace was. It was the blessing he had searched for all of his life. May we see ourselves as God sees us because God made us and God sees us as good, as beloved. When we face a crisis, may we struggle through the process, trusting that we will see the blessings of God all around us. Amen.