



August 2, 2020
The Ninth Sunday of Pentecost
The Rev. Anthony Estes, Associate Rector

Have you ever made a mistake?
A kind of mistake that is a big, colossal blunder?
A kind of mistake that keeps you up at night?
The kind of mistake that you find you have no other recourse but then to pray to God or whoever else you thought might have been listening?

And perhaps if you did pray to God, did you find yourself rescued, saved, delivered, the situation better?

Have you ever paused...to say, "*Thank you, Lord?*"

Like the Gospel song says, "*If it had not been for the Lord who was on my side, **where** would I be? Have you ever been in a place like that where you realized that if God had not come to your aid when God did, you would not be where you are today?*"

God is a God that is faithful...even when we are *not* so faithful.

As the story from Genesis tells us, we last saw Jacob a couple of weeks ago where he was fleeing from his brother Esau. He had just stolen the blessing from Isaac, his father, from Esau, and he was headed to the land of Haran to find a wife.

And we know that he travels there, but before he can get to his destination, God visits him in a dream and tells him:

*"I am the God of Abraham, your grandfather. I am the God of Isaac, your father. And now I want to introduce myself to you because I want to be **your** God. I want to enter a special covenant relationship with you."*

"And...this is what I am going to do. This land where you are sleeping, I am going to give it to you. I am going to ensure that you get back to this place. I'm going to bless you so that all the families of the earth can also be blessed by you" (same blessing God gave to Jacob's grandfather Abraham by the way).

And Jacob wakes up and says, "*Hey, listen, if you want to do all of that, then you can be my God.*" And he built an altar there and worshiped.

He travels to his Uncle Laban's house in Haran. And, of course, while he's there, he finds the woman that he wants to marry, Laban's daughter Rachel, negotiates seven years of labor to marry Rachel. But on his wedding night, Rachel's sister Leah is there instead. So he's understandably upset, gets talked into working another seven years for Rachel.

Fourteen years later he has two wives and a few children and he is ready to go, but he's broke. He's penniless. So he works another six years to get some cattle, to build some wealth.

It's been 20 years since he's been to the land of his fathers. And just as the episode with Laban is coming to an end, with Laban hotly pursuing him and they eventually making peace, he finds out that Esau knows he's in town, and Esau has assembled a small army of 400 people to try to come and kill Jacob, as he presumes.

Jacob is in trouble. Jacob realizes the depth of his mistake and perhaps he thought that after 20 years, everybody would have calmed down. That perhaps everybody would have forgotten. That perhaps everybody would have moved on. That perhaps Esau would say, *"That was so long ago, it's ancient history now."*

He was in trouble.

And Genesis, Chapter 32, opens with Jacob praying to God and saying,

*"Listen, you know, you said that you were going to bless me. And you said that I would come back to this land. And you said that I would come back to this land. And you said that my children and my children's children would prosper. **You** said that."*

*"And now my brother is getting ready to kill me. I just got out of it with Laban. Here I am in this mess again. If you don't save me, what is going to happen to your Word? I realize the depth of my mistake. But God, **you** have to help me."*

And so there is he is. His wives and children are gone one way. His cattle and herds and the other men and perhaps women of his camp are gone in another way, and there he is left alone.

And to me it seems that the answer to that prayer was a visitation from perhaps an angel, perhaps God, perhaps *himself* beginning to wrestle...all... night...long.

He *perceives* this unseen force to be God and says, *"I'm not letting you go until you bless me."* The angel, the man wrestles with him, strikes his thigh and says, *"Tell me your name."* He answers, *"My name is Jacob, it's trickster, it's deceiver."*

And the voice says *"No, that's not your name anymore. It is Israel. For you have **wrestled** with God. You have **striven** with God. And you have prevailed."*

Perhaps some of you have felt like that. That every time you cry out to God and ask for help, instead of getting better, it gets worse. And you end up striving with yourself and striving with God.

And somehow in the midst of that you get a little hurt. But how many know that sometimes you might find yourself waking up and realizing that your name has been changed and you have *indeed* received a blessing. And the sun rises and you realize that everything is going to be all right.

Because if you could survive that encounter with *self*, if you could survive the encounter with *God*, then you can handle whatever else might come your way.

Beloved, my sister, my brother, you are stronger than what you know, because *who* you have inside you, Jesus Christ, the hope of glory, is *stronger* than any force that stands against you, *even if* that force is your own self-perception, your own mistakes, oops, bleeps, blunders, God is there to say, "*I have spoken over you. I have declared who and what...you..shall..be. So, struggle with me if you need to, but my **word** does not change.*"

[I'm out of time, so, let me wrap this up, because the preacher's getting happy.]

The point I want to leave with you this morning is that as you wrestle with God, as you wrestle with yourself, as you wrestle with these existential questions, as you wrestle with trying to come to terms with years and years of oppression that people think you should have forgotten by now, God's plan for you and for me...God's plan for us is that we prosper.

And that does not mean the absence of opposition. It does mean knowing that we can wrestle with God, that we can take those problems, those questions to God and God will engage with us.

And sometimes God's engagement will hurt you a little bit, but when you wake up in the morning you will realize that, that although it hurt me, it helped me...it blessed me...it changed my name...it transformed my life.

If it had not been for the Lord, who is on *my* side, who is on *your* side, who is on *our* side...where would we be?