

Eighth after Trinity - 2nd August 2020 - Genesis 32:22-31; Psalm 17:1-7; Rom 9:1-5; Matt 14:13-21

Psalm 17: 6 I call upon you, O God, for you will answer me; # incline your ear to me, and listen to my words. 7 Show me your marvellous loving-kindness # O Saviour of those who take refuge at your right hand from those who rise up against them.

May I speak in the name of God; Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

“I’m going on a picnic; would you care to join me? The sky is blue, the grass is green and well-watered, after rain. Passover is not far away. Thought we’d head on down to the lake. There’s a dash of excitement in the air because Yeshua, the Teacher, will be there. You know him, he’s the one who spoke blessings and encouragements to us a while back. He sounded a bit like Moses when he said, ‘You’ve heard it said...but I say to you...’ It was like nothing I’d ever heard before so I’m going back for more. I’m taking the family. The children need to see and hear him if he’s nearby because he spoke about a Kingdom, the Kingdom of Heaven, being like seeds and mustard, yeast and treasure, pearls and nets. Sounded so good but then that devil Herod went and killed his cousin, John. Quite horrible. I can’t imagine how Yeshua must be feeling today, maybe he won’t come...”

This is the cliff hanger... in the meantime take a closer look at this image, part of an 1861 fresco by Eugène Delacroix, depicting an angel wrestling with Jacob after he moved his family across the Jabbock Ford



Have you ever wrestled with God or thoughts about God? I wonder...do you recognise any small part of this picture in your own spiritual journey? Muscles and sinews straining... holding your breath...standing your ground... feeling like you are pushing against an unseen force. Maybe, like Jonah, you ran away or, like Mary Magdalene, you ran headlong towards. Maybe you are wrestling with God now, about a virus, an unexpected death, about why people see skin colour, about plastic waste and climate change. What more does God want from me, you may be asking?

In today's Genesis reading, Jacob is likewise challenged; he wrestled an angel and would not let go. His hip was put out and his name was changed to 'Israel' meaning, *'Isra' one who strives with 'El'/God and humans and survives'*. Jacob held on for a blessing, a defining moment for his family's future and his developing relationship with El [*Hebrew diminutive of Elohim as no vowels are pronounced or written.*]

You may notice this event laid a blue print for what Moses does in the Exodus stories. Moses constantly wrestled with God and survived. I recently saw part of the 2014 film, 'Exodus: Gods and Kings' in which Director Ridley Scott characterises God as an 11-year-old boy who constantly challenges Moses about his decisions and motives. Very disturbing. Wrestling appears to be an appropriate verb!

It may be helpful to think of Jesus inwardly wrestling, in the Garden of Gethsemane certainly, but also at the beginning of Matthew's version of feeding a large crowd. Still wrestling with grief, Jesus left his desolation on the boat and showed the crowd how a Kingdom of Heaven King would act. He displayed God's radical, inexhaustible loving-kindness by spending the day *'curing their sick'*. When it was still early enough to go to near-by villages, the concerned disciples asked Jesus to send the people away.

Back to the picnic...

"Yeshua looked sad so I told the children to wave. He waved back as he passed by. All I could hear were people's praises and thankyou's for the healings. Suddenly, my stomach rumbled. There was a commotion. Everyone sat down; silence fell, all eyes on Yeshua. *'You give them something to eat'*, he said to his friends, *'...but we only have... five loaves and two fish'*. This seemed to be the right answer, *'...but we only have...'*. *'Thank you'*, he said, *'that will do nicely; I will bless your offerings and thank my Father in Heaven'*.

Not only were we fed, there were basketsful left over for those who weren't there! My neighbour said they represented the 12 tribes of Israel giving their bread to the world's nations. Whether that is true or not, I don't know. All I do know is that I was hungry, now I am not. Praise be to God! Thank you Yeshua, the Healer.'

Jacob wrestled and waited for a blessing; Jesus wrestled with grief so he could heal the crowd who would then be ready to be fed by His Heavenly Father with apparently insignificant amounts of bread. The rest, as they say, is his-story.

Let's pray: Thank you, God, for Jesus, and for showing us Your radical, inexhaustible loving-kindness through this simple act of sharing bread. Amen.