

“Contrasting Freud with God”  
Sermon 10-17-10  
Immanuel Lutheran Church  
Neal Collins, Pastor

### ***Genesis 32:22–31***

*The same night [Jacob] got up and took his two wives, his two maids, and his eleven children, and crossed the ford of the Jabbok. <sup>23</sup>He took them and sent them across the stream, and likewise everything that he had. <sup>24</sup>Jacob was left alone; and a man wrestled with him until daybreak. <sup>25</sup>When the man saw that he did not prevail against Jacob, he struck him on the hip socket; and Jacob's hip was put out of joint as he wrestled with him. <sup>26</sup>Then he said, "Let me go, for the day is breaking." But Jacob said, "I will not let you go, unless you bless me." <sup>27</sup>So he said to him, "What is your name?" And he said, "Jacob." <sup>28</sup>Then the man said, "You shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel, for you have striven with God and with humans, and have prevailed." <sup>29</sup>Then Jacob asked him, "Please tell me your name." But he said, "Why is it that you ask my name?" And there he blessed him. <sup>30</sup>So Jacob called the place Peniel, saying, "For I have seen God face to face, and yet my life is preserved." <sup>31</sup>The sun rose upon him as he passed Peniel, limping because of his hip.*

### **Pleasure vs. Pain**

The Freudian Principle of pain and pleasure makes perfect sense. We avoid pain and move toward pleasure. The God Principle in the story of Jacob states that, through pain we move into wholeness. When it comes to pain, physical, emotional, relational, most of us want to avoid it, get out it, or forget it. This morning the story of Jacob invites you to the edge of the struggles in your own life. Some of you may feel like Jacob this morning - being on the run for so long, wondering if you can go home again - home to God. Some of you may have just accepted your situation as it is, some of you may not be struggling with anything at the moment, but know someone who is. There seems to be a tendency in struggles to “clean it up, paint it up, or fix it up.” This morning you are invited to an alternative in your struggles, particularly with God.

### **Jacob**

You need to know the significance of the name Jacob; in Hebrew his name means, “Heel”. He grabbed his twin brother’s heel when they were born. His name means “the cheat, the manipulator, and various associations with con artist. Until he has the encounter with God in our lesson this morning, he lived up to his name. He stole his brother Esau’s birthright/inheritance by offering him some bread and lentil stew when he was hungry. (chp. 25) When his father was old and poor in sight, he asked for Esau, his oldest, so he could bless him. Rebekah, his wife, favored Jacob, and conspired with him to steal the blessing from his brother Esau. They lied to his father by disguising Jacob as Esau, and telling his father he was Esau. Jacob stole the blessing. (chp. 27) Esau wanted to kill him, and would have, so Rebekah packed up Jacob and sent him to Uncle Laban.

There, Jacob met his match. He fell in love with the youngest daughter of Laban, Rachel, and wanted to marry her. Her father set the requirement of 7 years of work. Jacob complied, but on his wedding night, he discovered he married her old sister Leah! He complained, and was told by Laban that the first daughter had to be married before the second. Laban required 7 more years of work for Rachel.

Twenty years go by, Jacob now has two wives, 11 children and two slaves and is exhausted by Laban's manipulation of him. An Angel of God appears to him in a dream saying, "Now leave this land and return to the land of your birth." (chp.31) So, with his children, wives, and servants, along with his livestock, he heads home to face his brother Esau. Fearful that Esau will kill him, Jacob sends gifts of rams, goats, sheep, and donkeys, as a peace offering. So, we enter our story at this point, the story of a cheater, a con artist, and a liar returning home.

### **Wrestling**

After sending his wives, servants, livestock and children across the river, he is alone on the river Jabbok. Jabbok means "to wrestle." The river got its name from the story of Jacob wrestling. He tosses and turns through the night in fear of meeting his brother Esau. "A man wrestled with him until daybreak..." Who was this "man" who "struck him on the hip socket... (causing his hip to be ) put out of joint" when Jacob refused to let him go. Was it God, a dream, an angel, his imagination? We are given a clue in the end, saying Jacob named the place "Peniel" because "I have seen God face to face and my life is preserved."

But Jacob would not let go of the experience until he got a blessing. This is where we come into the story. Who sitting here this morning has not tossed and turned through the night? Who has not struggled with the consequences of their own actions, choices, and decisions? We like to think we can just move on, but they seem to hang onto us like that hang nail that keeps growing and growing. We all have things in our closets we prefer not to remember, experiences we want to forget, endings that seem to haunt us during the night because during the day we can divert ourselves. No matter how hard we try to forget, they emerge and re-emerge in our thoughts. What are we to do? What can we do? If we follow the Jacob story as an example, we acknowledge the experiences of our lives. Jacob is asked "What is your name?" By saying his name, he admits he is a cheat, liar, and a con. The truth, as Jesus says in the Gospel of John. "will set you free"

Before any healing can happen in our lives on the metaphorical river Jabbok, we need to lift up and acknowledge the pain. The pain we have inflicted on others, the struggle we are facing we don't want to acknowledge, and the conflicts within our souls. Consciously or unconsciously we spend a lot of time on the edge of the river of our lives with nice diversions and escapes during the daylight hours. but we always come home to ourselves at night.

### **Transformed by Hope**

A Benedictine nun by the name of Joan Chittister uses the Jacob story as the basis of her book *Scarred by Struggle, Transformed by Hope*. She sees our struggles of fear, isolation, pain, vulnerability, exhaustion, and change as being transformed by hope. The hope being conversion (like with Jacob after he was blessed), faith, transformation, surrender, and limitations - for in the end we become true. Our struggles and scars of loss, divorce, illness, deceit, lies, and woundedness can be healed, so one can move on as Jacob moved on.

For Jacob, the scar was his name, his past, and his deceit. From this encounter with God on the bank of the river Jabbok, Jacob is blessed with a new name, though elements of the old remain. His new name is Israel, a new name, identity, and character. His life is transformed as God turns him in a new direction. Now the question we may ask is, can the power of God that transformed Jacob's life transform our lives? As Jesus asked the man who laid by the pool of Siloam for 38 years "Do you want to be well?" There is hope, regardless of the scars you carry, there is hope your life can be different. Jacob continued to wrestle with God and his demons after this experience.

### **Out of Joint**

Jacob, saw the face of God, according to Frederick Beuechner, in the MAGNIFICENT DEFEAT. What he saw "was something more terrible than the face of death –the face of love... power, success, and happiness as the world knows them are his who will fight for them hard enough; but peace, love, and joy are only from God...before giving us everything, he demands of us everything, before giving us life, he demands our lives, ourselves, and our treasures." God desires the best for you, and wants to bring you into wholeness. His love is tough and wounding. He knocks our hips out of joint so we can be raised to new life. This is the God who comes to us in the brokenness of his own body, knocked out of joint on a cross, so world might be made whole through him.

Many of you didn't jump out of bed this morning and come here hoping to find out whatever happened to Jacob. I suspect some of you came here this morning like Jacob, on the edge of the river Jabbok in your fear of the unknown, and hoping God would do something in your life. It is risky to move from the Freudian Principle of pain and pleasure to the God Principle of pain and healing. Freud gives us a short term escape with distractions and diversions. God offers us renewal, re-connection, and re-building of your life re-gardless of where you find yourself this morning or any morning of your life.