

**Sunday, July 1st, 2018**

*A couple of minutes prior to the start of the service at 10:45am, the liturgist will enter and take his/her seat on the Chancel. The pastor will enter and offer a welcome, and make announcements....*

*The preacher will then ask... "Are there any other announcements or concerns of the church that need to be made known at this time? Thank you.*

**PRELUDE** "America, the Beautiful" - Arr. Jason W. Krug Dr. Elizabeth Davis

*When the prelude concludes, the liturgist will step to the lectern & say...*

*"Would you join me in reading our responsive call to worship, adapted from Psalm 17 and printed in our bulletins."*

*The liturgist should read only the leader's (plain text) portion.*

**THE CALL TO WORSHIP** (adapted from Psalm 17)

Hear a just cause, O Lord; attend to my cry; give ear to my prayer from lips free of deceit.

**From you let my vindication come; let your eyes see the right.**

If you try my heart, if you visit me by night, if you test me, you will find no wickedness in me; my mouth does not transgress.

**As for what others do, by the word of your lips I have avoided the ways of the violent.**

My steps have held fast to your paths; my feet have not slipped.

**I call upon you, for you will answer me, O God; incline your ear to me, hear my words.**

Wondrously show your steadfast love, O savior of those who seek refuge from their adversaries at your right hand.

**As for me, I shall behold your face in righteousness; when I awake I shall be satisfied, beholding your likeness.**

Let us worship God beginning with prayer...

**THE PRAYER OF INVOCATION**

Let us pray... O God, we praise your name and give thanks for your creative power. We come here in need of an authentic encounter with you. Like Jacob wrestling with the angel, let this hour of worship be a time of sacred struggle. Help us to grapple with the mysteries of our faith with vigor and purpose. And bless and transform us in the process. Give us a heart to serve you in all things. Amen.

Would all of you who are able please stand as we sing our opening hymn, "For the Beauty of the Earth", #473 in our *Hymnals*.

*The liturgist will step back out of the lectern for the singing of the hymn.*

\*HYMN "For the Beauty of the Earth" *The Hymnal #473*

*After the hymn the minister will say...*

\*CALL TO CONFESSION

Let us come into God's presence with the awareness that all are in need of God's grace and forgiveness. God is holy and just, and we know we fall short. But God is also gracious to hear, so we can be honest in prayer. Let us confess our sins before God and one another, as we pray together the prayer of confession printed in our bulletins. Let us pray...

\*PRAYER OF CONFESSION (In Unison)

Gracious God, following you toward our forever home is a constant struggle. We wrestle with our consciences over issues of right and wrong, and refuse to surrender to your vision and call. We admit that we find it difficult to trust your leadership, even though we so often make a mess of things when we are left to choose for ourselves. We say we are happy to follow Christ — but that confidence is betrayed by the truth that such obedience remains faithful only up to a point. Strengthen our grip, Lord, so that we can hold on to you and your leading until we discover that we have been blessed in our struggles. Amen.

\*SILENT CONFESSION

*Pause for about 30 seconds of silence.*

**\*THE ASSURANCE OF PARDON**

Yes, God's love is abundant. God is quick to hear our prayer and is quicker still to forgive. Let the cross be a sign for each of us — our debt is paid, and His mercy flows out, sufficient for all. Claim the freedom that is yours in Jesus Christ! Friends believe the Good News!

**In Jesus Christ, we are forgiven! Thanks be to God!**

**\*GLORIA PATRI**

*The Hymnal #579*

***Glory be to the Father, & to the Son, & to the Holy Ghost;***

***As it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be, World without end. Amen, Amen.***

**\*PASSING OF THE PEACE**

We have been reconciled to the Father through the gracious gift of his Son. Let us also be reconciled one with another and share the peace of Christ. The peace of Christ be with you.

**And also with you.**

*Share the peace of Christ with others as you will.*

*After a few moments, the liturgist will step into pulpit and say...*

*“At this time I want to invite our kids to come forward for a word from the Lord brought o them by Ms. Kathy Gean.”*

*The liturgist will take a seat.*

**CHILDREN'S SERMON**

*(All Singing)*

***Jesus friend so kind and gentle, little ones we bring to thee;  
Grant to them thy dearest blessing. Let thine arms around them be;  
Now enfold them in thy goodness, from all danger keep them free.***

Ask the children to tell you what they would call a person who has gone to college, and medical school, and then has started to practice medicine (Doctor). What they would call a person who has gone to college, and law school, and then has started to work as a judge (Your Honor). These new names are given to people after they have worked long and hard, and have struggled to make it into their chosen professions. Tell them the story of Jacob, who wrestled with God all night long, and was not defeated (Genesis 32:22-31). Ask them if he was given a new name after his long, hard struggle. Explain that Jacob's name was changed to Israel, which means “the one who strives with God.” Tell the children that there are some names in life that require a lot of hard work, but they are worth the struggle, because they tell the world that we have become the people that God wants us to be. Close by saying that we can all work hard to be known by the name “Christian” — a name that requires a struggle, but tells the world that we are followers of God's Son, Jesus Christ.

*As the children leave, the liturgist will return to the pulpit and say...*

*“Would those who are able please stand as we all join together in singing Hymn #384 in our Hymnals, “O Love, That Wilt Not Let Me Go”.*

*The Liturgist will take a seat until after the hymn.*

**\*HYMN**

*“O Love, That Wilt Not Let Me Go”*

*The Hymnal #384*

*After the hymn, the liturgist will return to the lectern and say...*

**INVITATION TO THE OFFERING**

**Please be seated....** God has blessed us beyond all of our deserving and expectations. But the blessings we have received are not for us alone, but to share with others so that relationships may be reconciled, and others brought near to you and your love which will never let us go. Let us give generously and joyfully as we continue our worship with the presentation of our tithes and offerings....

*The Liturgist will sit down until the Doxology.*

**THE OFFERTORY**

**Dr. Elizabeth Davis**

**"Consecrated, Lord, to Thee" - Arr. Douglas E. Wagner**

**\*DOXOLOGY (In Unison)**

*The Hymnal #592*

***Praise God from whom all blessings flow;  
Praise Him all creatures here below;***

*Praise Him above ye heavenly hosts;  
Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Amen.*

*After the Doxology, the liturgist will return to the lectern and say...*

**\*OFFERTORY PRAYER**

Let us pray... O God, we seek the transformation of ourselves and of the world around us, but we also fear the change it could bring. Grant us the trust and courage to acknowledge your gracious reign among us. Take these gifts as symbols of our desire to genuinely love our neighbors as ourselves. May they be used to build a better world, where your love and salvation are known by all, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

**\*THE AFFIRMATION OF FAITH**

**The Apostle's Creed**

Let us remain standing and reaffirm our Christian faith as it is expressed in the traditional version of the Apostles' Creed printed in our bulletins. Let us say what we believe. . .

**I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and in Jesus Christ, His only Son our Lord who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried; He descended into Hell; the third day He rose again from the dead; He ascended into heaven and sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from thence He shall come to judge the quick & the dead. I believe in the Holy Ghost, the holy catholic church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.**

*Invite the congregation to... "Be seated," and sit down.*

**SPECIAL MUSIC**

**"O God of Bethel, by Whose Hand"**

**Joanna Smith, Soprano**

*After the Special Music, the liturgist will return to the lectern & say...*

**SCRIPTURE READINGS**

Our first lesson for today is taken from The Letter to the Romans, the fifth chapter, beginning at the first verse. If you would like to follow along, turn to page 980 in your pew bibles. Listen now for the word of God...

"Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Through him we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in our hope of sharing the glory of God. More than that, we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit which has been given to us.

While we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. Why, one will hardly die for a righteous man -- though perhaps for a good man one will dare even to die. But God shows his love for us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us. Since, therefore, we are now justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God."

*The liturgist will return to his/her seat in the congregation.*

*When the liturgist finishes, the preacher will step into the pulpit & say...*

Our sermon text for today is taken from the Book of Genesis the thirty-second chapter, beginning at the twenty-second verse. If you would like to follow along in your pew bibles, you can find it on page 28 in your pew bibles. Listen once more for the Word of God:

"The same night he arose and took his two wives, his two maids, and his eleven children, and crossed the ford of the Jabbok. He took them and sent them across the stream, and likewise everything that he had.

And Jacob was left alone; and a man wrestled with him until the breaking of the day. When the man saw that he did not prevail against Jacob, he touched the hollow of his thigh; and Jacob's thigh was put out of joint as he wrestled with him. Then he said, "Let me go, for the day is breaking." But Jacob said, "I will not let you go, unless you bless me."

And he said to him, "What is your name?"

And he said, "Jacob."

Then he said, "Your name shall no more be called Jacob, but Israel, for you have striven with God and with men, and have prevailed."

Then Jacob asked him, "Tell me, I pray, your name."

But he said, "Why is it that you ask my name?" And there he blessed him. So Jacob called the name of the place Peni'el, saying, "For I have seen God face to face, and yet my life is preserved."

The sun rose upon him as he passed Penu'el, limping because of his thigh."

L: This is the Word of the Lord.

C: **Our thanks be to God!**

## THE SERMON

## “Wrestling for a Blessing”

The people of the covenant had a history of working scalawags into their story. They had kings who killed their own children out of fear, others who killed them because they loved a stone god of their own making more. They had judges, heroes who whored around and spent money like there was no tomorrow. Others committed murder to hide their lesser crimes. The central figure of our story today had a reputation for taking what he wanted-- fair didn't matter. Right and wrong didn't matter. He was a silver tongued devil who always seemed to take his shot when his opponent was at his weakest. He was a master of sleight of hand and fancy footwork. He had gained a seamy reputation of getting what he wanted by hook or crook—or both.

He wouldn't have spit on his brother Esau if he was on fire. He wouldn't do anything for his brother unless there was something in it for him. He would have stepped on and climbed over his poor old brother if he could just get one limb higher on the family tree. He even pulled the wool over the eyes of his own father, an especially dirty trick since his father was already half-blind. And his mother was his accomplice.

He conned his father-in-law out of his best livestock and, when no one was looking, he took the kids and grandkids and the cattle and skedaddled.

Yes, Jacob had a terrible reputation, because for him, the ends always justified the means. His conscience was calloused just enough to let him sleep and his feet were just fast enough to keep him one step ahead of the consequences.

That is, until he reached a river called Jabbok. (Genesis 32) At Jabbok his own cunning caught up with him.

Jacob was camped near the river Jabbok when word reached him that his big, hairy brother, Esau was coming to meet him. It had been twenty years since Jacob had defrauded his brother. More than enough time, Jacob realized, for Esau to have prepared his revenge.

Experience had taught Jacob that trouble was probably waiting for him. And now he was out of tricks. He was finally going to have to face his brother, himself, and God.

To Jacob's credit, he didn't run this time. Maybe he was tired of running. Or tired of looking at the shadow of a man that he saw every morning in the mirror. Or maybe he just couldn't keep track of all the lies and victims anymore. Whatever the motivation, it was enough to cause him to cross Jabbok Creek alone, and face the facts.

The word Jabbok in Hebrew means "wrestle," and wrestle is what Jacob did. He wrestled with his past: all the lies, all the scheming, all the shame. He was a spider trapped in his own web of deceit and craftiness, and had to wrestle with himself. But more than anything, he wrestled with God.

He wrestled with the same God who had descended the ladder at Bethel to assure Jacob he wasn't alone-- even though he deserved to be. He met the same God who had earlier guaranteed Jacob that he would never break his promise (though one could hardly fault God if he did). He confronted the same God who had reminded Jacob that the land prepared for him was still his. (Proof again that God blesses us *in spite* of the way we live and not *because of* how we live.)

Jacob wrestled with God the entire night. On the banks of Jabbok he rolled in the mud of his mistakes. He met God face to face, sick of his past and in desperate need of a fresh start. And be-

cause Jacob wanted it so badly, God honored his determination. God gave him a new name and a new promise. But he also gave a wrenched hip as a reminder of that mysterious night at the river.

Jacob wasn't the only man in the Bible to wrestle with self and God because of what he had done. David did after his rendezvous with Bathsheba. Samson wrestled, blind and bald after Delilah's seduction. Peter wrestled with the sound of a crowing cock ringing in his ears. Paul wrestled with the prayer of forgiveness offered for him by Stephen while he played his part in Stephen's execution by stoning.

And I suspect that most of us have spent some time wrestling on the river bank as well. Our scandalous deeds have a way of finding us. All of us at one time or another have had to face up to our past. And when our sins catch up with us we can do one of two things: run or wrestle.

Many choose to run. They brush it off with a shrug of rationalization. "I was a victim of circumstances." Or, "It was her fault." Or, "**He's** done worse things." The problem with this escape is that it's no escape at all. It's only a shallow camouflage. No matter how many layers of make-up you put over a black eye, underneath it is still black. And down deep it still hurts.

Jacob finally figured that out. As a result, his example is one worthy of imitation. The best way to deal with our past is to hitch up our pants, roll up our sleeves, and face it head on. No more buck-passing or scapegoating. No more glossing over or covering up. No more games. We need a confrontation with our Master.

We too should cross the creek alone and struggle with God over ourselves-- our deeds and misdeeds. We too should stand eyeball to eyeball with him and let him unmask our stained hearts and grimy souls. We need to be real with the One who knows our most secret sins.

After his encounter with God, Jacob was a new man. He crossed the river in the dawn of a new day and faced Esau with newly found courage.

Each step he took, however, was a painful one. His stiff hip was a reminder of the lesson he had learned at Jabbok: Shady dealings bring pain. Mark it down: Play today & tomorrow you'll pay.

And for you who wonder if you've played too long to change, take courage from Jacob's legacy. No man is too bad for God. To transform a con man into God's man is no easy task. But for God, it's all in a night's work.

### **THE PASTORAL PRAYER & THE LORD'S PRAYER**

O God, We give you thanks for the Scripture that bears witness to your presence. The words leap from the pages and challenge our timid ways. Keep us mindful, O God, of those who have gone before us and of the history in which we stand. May we be ever mindful that when you wrestled with Jacob, you marked him, named him, and called him your own. You called forth a people, and with your oath you promised that they would endure. May the same miracle take place in our struggles with you.

Lord, give us courage to confront ourselves honestly, to shuck the pretense and strip to the real; to act justly with those close to us, and advocate justice for those distant from us to work to heal what is injured in our lives, and to celebrate the wondrous rest. O God, lead us in the narrow way of trust, and accompany us into the awe or ache so deep that we are forced to sort out what matters. Transform us by your grace that we will be confident of your blessing upon our lives and stirred to bless others.

Lord, we are unworthy to come before you, to stand on holy ground, and to seek your help and grace. But trusting only in the comforting words by which you invite us to your table, we come to you. Pour out your Spirit upon these common elements that they may become uncommon. Grant that by his body, our bodies may be made clean; that our souls may be washed in his most precious blood; that our wills become so surrendered to you; that we may easily recognize you in whatever guise you may be found, and that others may recognize you in us, enabling us to serve as instruments of your grace, through Jesus Christ our Lord, who taught us to pray, saying...

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done; On

earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; & forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors; And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory, forever. Amen.

## THE SACRAMENT OF THE LORD'S SUPPER

### The Invitation

Come to this sacred table, not because you must, but because you may; come to testify not that you are righteous, but that you sincerely love our Lord Jesus Christ, and desire to be his true disciples; come not because you are strong, but because you are weak; not because you have any claim on the grace of God, but because in your frailty and sin you stand in constant need of his mercy and help; come, not to express an opinion, but to seek his presence and pray for his Spirit.

### The Words of Institution

On the night in which he was betrayed, our Lord took bread, and after he had give thanks, he broke it and gave it to his disciples saying: "Take, eat. This is my body which is broken for you. Do this in remembrance of me."

In like fashion after they had eaten, he took the cup. After he had given thanks he gave it to his disciples saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood, drink ye all of it."

For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes again in final victory.

### The Distribution of the Elements

### The Prayer After Receiving

Strengthen for service, Lord, the hands that have taken holy things. May the ears which have heard your word be deaf to clamor and dispute. May the tongues which have sung your praise be free from deceit. May the eyes which have seen the tokens of your love shine with the light of hope; and may the bodies which have been fed with your body be refreshed with the fullness of your life that we may bring glory to you forever. Amen.

Let all of us who are able stand and join in one voice to sing our hymn of dedication, "Precious Lord, Take My Hand", hymn #404 in our *Hymnal*.

\*HYMN

"Precious Lord, Take My Hand"

*The Hymnal #404*

## THE BLESSING

May the Lord bless you and keep you. May the Lord make His face to shine upon you and give you His peace-- in your coming in and your going out; in your lying down and in your rising up; in your labor and in your leisure; in your laughter and in your tears; until you come to stand before Jesus in that day in which there is no sunset and no dawning. Amen.

\*CONGREGATION RESPONSE

"Go Now in Peace"

Go now in peace. Never be afraid.

God will go with you each hour of everyday.

Go now in faith, steadfast, strong and true.

Know He will guide you in all you do.

Go now in love, and show you believe.

Reach out to others so all the world can see.

God will be there, watching from above.

Go now in peace, in faith, and in love. Amen, Amen, Amen.

\*POSTLUDE

Dr. Elizabeth Davis