

Grace: God's undeserved love for each and every one of us. Mercy: God forgiving us our sin for the sake of His Son, Jesus Christ. And Peace: peace of heart, peace of mind... peace with God. All of these are yours from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

The portion of Scripture before us today is found in the book of Genesis the thirty-second chapter beginning at the twenty-second verse:

²² And he arose that night and took his two wives, his two female servants, and his eleven sons, and crossed over the ford of Jabbok. ²³ He took them, sent them over the brook, and sent over what he had. ²⁴ Then Jacob was left alone; and a Man wrestled with him until the breaking of day. ²⁵ Now when He saw that He did not prevail against him, He touched the socket of his hip; and the socket of Jacob's hip was out of joint as He wrestled with him. ²⁶ And He said, "Let Me go, for the day breaks." But he said, "I will not let You go unless You bless me!" ²⁷ So He said to him, "What is your name?" He said, "Jacob." ²⁸ And He

said, "Your name shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel; for you have struggled with God and with men, and have prevailed." ²⁹ Then Jacob asked, saying, "Tell me Your name, I pray." And He said, "Why is it that you ask about My name?" And He blessed him there. And Jacob called the name of the place Peniel: "For I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved."

Heavenly Father, these are Your words.
Sanctify us by the truth, Your word is truth.
Amen.

Dear Redeemed by the Blood of the Lamb,

“And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance, character; and character, hope. Now hope does not disappoint...” This is from God's letter to us, written by Saint Paul to the Christians at Rome and even here at Omro. Paul is reminding us that we are to glory in tribulations because tribulations are good for us.

This may not seem like the most sensical and “now-a-days” answer, but it is indeed the godly answer. Nowadays it feels like most people are looking for the path of least resistance, for the easy way, or even for the path that will hurt the least. So many times when we vote for politicians it comes down to the “lesser of two evils.” Which one isn’t going to hurt so much... that’s the one I want. But that mentality seems to fly in the face of what Jacob is going through in our text.

Jacob is coming home after nearly two decades away. He had worked hard for his uncle, raising his flocks and caring for all his land. Now Jacob finally had his two wives and his children and his flocks and his herds and he was ready to go home. Most people may have given up when after working seven years they were denied what they wanted most... but Jacob kept on. And finally when it was all finished, Jacob wanted to go home. Home to a brother who had sworn to kill him. But Jacob went home. He went home with the assurance that God would be with him every step of the way. Jacob had taken the “hard road” and he had many

tribulations, but with tribulations come perseverance and with perseverance, hope... and hope does not disappoint. And so it is with us, in our lives that we live, in the mire and mock of everyday life, ***we must persevere, we must persist with God.***

It is not every sermon that I like to change the text as it is before us, but with this one I have taken a little bit of liberty. Now it does not change the meaning of the text, it is simply using an alternate definition of a greek term. Instead of saying that we must struggle with God... I prefer to think of our struggle not so much as a battle, but more of an endurance or a persisting.

Thus in our text, when the man tells Jacob that his name is no longer Jacob but Israel, because “you have struggled...” I prefer to look at it as “you have persisted...” And is that not the context of this text and our other two texts also?

In our Gospel lesson, Jesus encourages us to be persistent, like the widow, with God. The judge

gets tired of hearing from this widow, and says, “I will avenge her lest by her continual coming she weary me.” Now, no, this is not how God views us, but Jesus is trying to show how we are to approach God... be persistent. Continually pursue Him, continually approach Him, continually persist in Him.

Or consider Paul’s letter to Timothy. In the letter Paul tells young Timothy that he must “continue” in the things learned. That Timothy should “be ready in season and out of season.” That the things of the world will not “endure.” That Timothy should “be watchful in all things, endure affliction.” This is the message that God would have us take away from our text.

Jacob is wrestling with God and with men. He had just persisted through everything that Laban could throw at him. He had persisted through the thought of death and was coming home. Now he had to persist, to struggle, with God. Jacob wrestled with God and when God saw that the morning was coming, he allowed more ‘tribulation’ to enter Jacob’s life. God touched his hip socket and it was out of joint.

yet, out of this wrestling, out of this persisting with God... Jacob was blessed.

So, now, with you... how often do you persist with God? How often do you come before God with the same prayer, day in and day out? Or are we falling more and more into the realm of “God didn’t listen to me today, so I will not ask again?” If Jacob had taken that tact, he would have never gone home. And yet, it is becoming so normal in our day in age.

But I shouldn’t have to persist with God... He should just bless me. We’ve come to believe in the concept of a “trouble-free” life which extends to our marriages and children. We’ve come to believe in the concept of a “worry-free” existence... In fact, maybe we’ve come to the conclusion that just like my salvation, I didn’t do anything for it, so why should I have to start working now?

And yet, those faithful Christians, who have come and gone before you know what a challenge maintaining the faith can be. Talk about persisting with God; they endured

stonings, hangings, burnings, beatings, and much more... and remained faithful to God. They persisted through false teachers and the uprising of false religions. They persisted through false brothers and a government that wanted their extermination. They persisted... because they were faithful.

In fact, just think of Jesus Christ. Think of what He endured to get you into heaven. Jesus lived a life of temptation, yet never once gave in to it. Jesus lived a life of mockery, yet never answered back in kind. Jesus lived a life of unbelief from those around Him and yet He always believed in what He was doing. Jesus was beaten and hung on a cross, and while up there He prayed for the forgiveness of all people. Jesus was forsaken by God as the worst of sinners, He endured the pain of hell on the cross for you and for me... and still He loved us. Jesus persisted, when many of us would have thrown in the towel. Jesus persisted because He knew it meant eternity in heaven for us, when He lived, died, and rose again to take away our sins. Jesus persisted for you...

And this brings us back to our text. Jacob was in a wrestling match, of which kind we do not know. Some think physical, some think spiritual, some think prayer... I say why not all of that. Jesus Christ, as the preincarnate Son of God, before He took on human flesh as a baby, came to earth and wrestled with Jacob... of this we all agree.

According to Chemnitz and early church fathers this is a reference to the pre-incarnate Christ. According to Hoenecke (p169-170), “Also particularly those passages that speak of the Angel of the Lord. It will be universally admitted that all these passages speak about an uncreated Angel who is in essence identical with Yahweh and to whom are ascribed divine glory, names, and power.” According to Gerhard, “On the basis of this passage, we are correct in concluding that the true Jehovah, namely, the Son of God, is called “an Angel,” an uncreated one, to be precise.” According to Kretzmann, “It was the Lord Himself, in human form, who here assumed the role of an antagonist to Jacob, and for that reason Jacob insisted upon having His blessing before

permitting Him to depart.” I read these to you to show you the importance of this fact... Jacob wrestled with God. It was not some dream, it was not some figment of his imagination, it was not just a ruse... Jacob wrestled with God.

Not that Jesus is going to come down from heaven and wrestle with us today... or is He? Jesus is present with us and so is His Holy Spirit. Present inside each and every one of us, persisting, struggling with our Old Adam to keep him at bay, so the New Man of faith can rise in our hearts. Jesus is present with us in His Word... struggling, persisting with us so that we may know the truth and the truth shall set us free. Jesus is present with us... He is present in this church where two or three come together to hear His Word and He is struggling with us, He is persisting with us to keep us focused on His Word. Jesus is present with us... he is present in His Supper, He is bodily present in the bread and wine that we receive for Holy Communion, struggling, persisting with our hearts and our minds to believe in Him and in all that He has done for us.

And it is through faith... a struggle that we call faith, that we know that heaven is waiting for us when this life is over. Yes, friends, faith is a struggle. Our Old Adam and the world want to steal away our faith and kill it... but we persist in hearing and reading God’s Word, in receiving the Lord’s Supper and in remembering our baptism... and we win the struggle, we persist, because God gives us the strength.

As Kretzmann says, “So it was not only a bodily struggle, but a spiritual wrestling as well which Jacob was obliged to endure. But he stood the test, he persevered until he had received the Lord’s blessing, until he saw the face of God turned to him in mercy, until his soul was healed of all its fear and terror.”

And this too happens to us. When, by faith, we win this fight and we are called home we can say with Jacob, “I have seen God face to face and my life is preserved.” Friends, when we see Jesus Christ, when we recognize Him in our world and when we see God’s hand in action, then we know that we have seen God. When we

struggle with the things in our lives... we can know that God has put struggles and tribulations in our lives to strengthen us. As Paul reminds us: Tribulations produce perseverance, perseverance character, character hope... and hope does not disappoint us.

Dear friends in Christ, during our lifetimes, we will struggle. Times will be hard. There will be more than once that we walk away from God... but when we return, when we persist in our faith, when we trust in Jesus Christ for everything that we need in this world and in the next... then we know that the struggles we endure are there to help us, to help us ***persist in God.***

Thank God for all the struggles that He allows us to endure. Thank God for the tribulations He puts into our lives. And thank God for the faith and strength to persist through those, so that we can enjoy heaven with Him because of all that Jesus Christ has done for us.

Thanks be to God. Amen.