

## **A Crippling Victory**

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### **Genesis 32:22-31**

32:22 The same night he got up and took his two wives, his two maids, and his eleven children, and crossed the ford of the Jabbok.

32:23 He took them and sent them across the stream, and likewise everything that he had.

32:24 Jacob was left alone; and a man wrestled with him until daybreak.

32:25 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.

32:26 Then he said, "Let me go, for the day is breaking." But Jacob said, "I will not let you go, unless you bless me."

32:27 So he said to him, "What is your name?" And he said, "Jacob."

32:28 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."

32:29 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.

32:30 So Jacob called the place Peniel, saying, "For I have seen God face to face, and yet my life is preserved."

32:31 The sun rose upon him as he passed Penuel, limping because of his hip.

## **Communion Meditation**

In the First Church of Cotton Belt, a man named Leroy Burns attended his own Excommunication. Leroy was a man who was taken to drink, as they say. Leroy was an alcoholic who attended worship regularly each Sunday. For a few years the church members who knew gave Leroy a sort of silent censure. The church was put on notice that Leroy was under scrutiny. Leroy was disciplined by the elders of the Church session. First, a visit was made by an elder and the pastor to communicate the expectation that Leroy change his behavior. After a year's time, Leroy's love of the bottle was met by the church running out of patience. A deadline was set for Leroy Burns to repent of his wicked, boozy ways before excommunication would take place. He wrestled with his disease, but did not win.

Leroy attended his excommunication and stood before the congregation. The pastor solemnly read the resolution declaring Leroy an unrepentant sinner with whom the church was no longer to associate.

Leroy stood there listening to it all and did not move. It was not out of stupidity as the congregation thought, nor out of protest as the pastor thought.

Leroy was there thinking what he'd like to say, "Bill, we missed you down at the Tavern on Friday. Jack, your wife tells us how you bully her at home. Yet, here I am the one getting excommunicated."

Leroy continued to worship each Sunday until he finally died of cirrhosis of the liver. He was present in worship until the week he died, but never again took communion.

It was as if Leroy stood there as testimony to a God who will not let us go, nor give up on us. It would have been easier if Leroy had just slipped away and gone quietly into the night. But rather, the congregation had to see their own failings and witness their judgment passed on poor Leroy. Each time they saw Leroy sit, excluded from the Lord's Supper, they were confronted with their own sin.

Mr. Arthur Green who owned the store overinflated his prices- a kind of cheating.

Lucille Jackson thought about all the times she gossiped about Leroy Burns, and anyone else for that matter.

Even the Clerk of Session, Don Smith, felt guilty that he indeed cheated on his taxes last year.

But they each came to the Lord's Table to receive the same grace and forgiveness that Jesus offers while Leroy sat alone and left out.

Leroy Burns was a visible reminder to all of the members of First Church, Cotton Belt who struggle and wrestle in the night. Leroy refused to relent or disappear.

He demanded that God and his people bless him, receive him, even with his limp.

Maybe in ways that we cannot even imagine, Leroy was wounded.

Jacob wrestled all night with God, but some, like Leroy, wrestle much longer.

I like to think that eventually Leroy walked into the daybreak with a new blessing and a new name in the end.

Maybe not this side of heaven, but in the end, a crippling victory.

If anyone is in Christ, she or he is a new creation, writes Paul. Maybe being made fully new can happen this side of heaven, but it is a process like an all-night wrestling match. God presents himself as a man...or something else.

The writer of Genesis tells us it was a man that Jacob wrestled.

I suppose God knew that Jacob needed a God with skin on.

A real live, visible person to encounter

learn from

wrestle with

even demand a blessing from...

God knows we need a God with skin on.

A real live, visible person to encounter

learn from

wrestle with

bend down and touch our smelly feet or our lame legs or our aching hearts.

Jacob didn't catch God's name that night at Peniel.

But Jesus came with a name- *Yeshua* like Joshua- meaning "God saves."

God sent Jesus fully human, fully divine to walk with us or even to get down in the dirt with us.

Jacob was worried about meeting his brother Esau, the one he cheated out of a birthright and his father's blessing.

Jacob was anxious as to whether Esau would kill him.

Jacob prayed to God for deliverance.

Finally after all those years he owned up to what he had done praying,

“I am not worthy of the least of all the steadfast love and faithfulness that you have shown to your servant...” (Genesis 32:10)

Yet God had kept God’s promise, Jacob realized.

Jacob had prospered and was blessed with a large family.

With that recognition, Jacob settled down to sleep after sending a peace offering across the river first to his brother Esau.

After Jacob wrestled with God that night, he realized he had seen the face of God.

He was given a limp, a blessing, and a new name, Israel because he struggled with God and humans and prevailed.

And the next day he met face to face with Esau, along with his 400 men.

Not knowing whether he would live to see the sunset,

He was ready to face him.

He came to his brother and bowed, face in the dirt.

There is nothing more humble than getting down in the dirt.

To his surprise and shock, his brother Esau, ran to meet him, embraced him, and fell on his neck, kissed him and they wept.

Jacob, now Israel, had seen God in the night, but never fully in the day because they departed just before daybreak.

But in the full light of day, Esau showed Israel, what the face of God looks like...

Mercy

Forgiveness

Strength

Love

What Jacob learned over time was that luckily for him, and us,  
God doesn't love people because of who they are, but because of who God is.  
And God is a God of mercy and grace. God is faithful to God's promises.

Maybe Leroy Burns in all his brokenness and his wounds knew that better than the good  
folks of First Church Cotton belt.

In his baptism, Leroy had died with Christ.

He was given a new name- redeemed sinner,

and a promise that he would be raised with Christ in glory.

He died an alcoholic.

He was crippled, but in Christ would have victory...eventually

Leroy knew that the Table belongs to the Lord

And Jesus' invitation to receive the gift of himself

is more about who God is than who we are.

So maybe he did receive a blessing after all.

### Communion Invitation

The table of bread and wine is ready.

It is the table of our Savior Jesus who invites all who wrestle in the night  
to meet him here.

It is a table of welcome and sharing with all in need especially the poor in mind, body,  
and spirit.

So come to this table those of you who have lots of faith, and you of little faith

You who come here often, or have not come in a long time.

You who have tried to follow Jesus, and you who have failed.

Come.

It is Christ Jesus who invites us to meet him here.

You who are named Child, redeemed sinner, come and receive your blessing.

### Closing Prayer

O God, make us your body and blood, your life poured out for the world.

Thanks be to God who gives us the victory through the crucified and risen Jesus. Amen.

## Jude Benediction

<sup>24</sup> Now to him who is able to keep you from falling, and to make you stand without blemish in the presence of his glory with rejoicing, <sup>25</sup> to the only God our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, power, and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen.