

**“Keep Fighting”**  
Message by DD Adams  
Providence United Methodist Church  
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The scriptural text for today is taken from the Old Testament, from the book of Genesis, chapter 32, verses 22 through 31. I’m reading from the New Revised Standard Version. 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. He took them and sent them across the stream, and likewise everything that he had. Jacob was left alone; and a man wrestled with him until daybreak. 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.

Then Jacob said, “Let me go, for the day is breaking. I will not let you go, unless you bless me.” So he said to him, “What is your name?” And he said, “Jacob.” 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.”

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. So Jacob called the place Peniel, saying, “For I have seen God face to face, and yet my life is preserved.” The sun rose upon him as he passed Peniel, limping because of his hip. This is God’s word of God people. Thanks be to God. God bless the reading, hearing, and understanding of your word today. Let your words be planted in our hearts and let them grow to produce the fruit of persistence and endurance. Amen.

Esau and Jacob, the twin boys of Isaac, had some trouble starting out on the right foot with each other. In fact, one could say they had trouble from the time they were inside of Rebekah their mother. Before the twins were born Rebekah felt

a lot of tumbling and kicking going on inside of her. So much so, she didn't even want to live. She decided to go to God about it, and this is what God said. "Two nations are in your womb, two peoples butting heads while still in your body. One people will overpower the other, and the older will serve the younger." That's how the twin's relationship started out. They had some real issues.

In the book of Genesis, Jacob, the younger of the twins, is consistently plotting and scheming. He's an opportunist you might say. You've heard the story of how Jacob plots to inherit Esau's birthright, and he succeeds! Then he tricks his father Isaac into giving him his brother's blessing. He succeeds at that too! Then later Jacob tricks his father-in-law Laban to receive the wages he'd earned. Well, before he knew it, he found himself pretty distanced from his family.

The text we read today finds Jacob on his way home with his family headed toward his ancestral land. With all the trouble he's had with his brother, he's scared to death of Esau. He's afraid! He thinks to himself, "What if my brother is seeking revenge against me? For all I know, my brother will seek to destroy my life!" So, Jacob makes a strategic move and divides his flocks, herds, and camels into two groups. He sends them to opposite camp sites. His thinking is this. "If Esau comes to the one camp and destroys it, then the camp that is left will be able to get away." (*The Message*) Jacob realized that if he or his family ran into trouble that night at least they'd be split up so some might survive.

During the night Jacob encounters a surprise attack from a man that wrestles him. Jacob maybe thinks the man is Esau, because he knows him to be strong. When the other wrestler sees that he can't overcome Jacob, he strikes him on the hip socket, and his hip goes out of joint.

At this point, the sun is coming up. Jacob wants to call it quits, but he won't let go of the man until he blesses him. He cries out, "I will not let you go, unless

you bless me.” The man says, “You shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel, for you have striven with God and with humans, and have prevailed.” Jacob inquires about the man’s name, but he won’t reveal it. Then the man blesses Jacob and Jacob says he’s seen the face of God. The sun rises up into the sky, and Jacob returns to his family . . . . . limping as he goes.

The limp identifies Jacob’s success rather than his defeat. He doesn’t exactly win the wrestling match, but the struggle turns the match into a positive one because he’s obtained a blessing from God. He has a new name—Israel. It means “God rules,” but it can also mean “to persevere.” In the story, when God gives Jacob his new name, Jacob refuses to let go. He demands a blessing! Jacob’s old name means “he takes by the heel,” which refers to the way Esau succeeded Jacob when they were born. It was Jacob’s fist that clutched tight to Esau’s heel. So when God changes Jacob’s name to Israel, he comes into his own independent destiny.

The picture we get of Jacob is that he’s strong! He refuses to give up or give in. He recognizes the man he wrestles with as God, but he doesn’t stop fighting. He doesn’t let go, he doesn’t bow down and do obeisance, and his hip gets knocked out of its socket by God, but he still keeps fighting! Jacob is seen as a stubborn, persistent, and enduring guy! He just does not stop!

Jacob had this propensity to scheme. He was known for being a self-seeking opportunist, and he was stubborn. In changing Jacob’s name, God seems to suggest a change that will take place in his character. Some scholars suggest this passage deals with Jacob’s scheming tendencies, but we don’t find Jacob repenting for the things he’s done? . . . . Here’s my thinking about this passage.

I don’t think God is really able to interact too deeply with believers that don’t grab ahold of him. As noted in the story, both Jacob and God wrestled. It takes two. God took the initiative to start the wrestling match, but Jacob kept it

going. He would not stop until God blessed him. He *didn't* stop until God changed his name. Jacob demanded to be blessed, and he was willing to fight for it. So a question to ask ourselves might be this. Is God willing to change his mind if we keep wrestling with him? Does God relent?

In the Bible there are some examples we can draw from. We find Abraham negotiating with God and succeeding. We find *God declaring* that Job was *right* to argue with him. We find God asking Isaiah to argue the matter out concerning the sin of Israel. Through the book of Psalms we hear David petitioning for what he wants. We find in the gospel of Luke a persistent widow insisting on her being exonerated by a judge, and she's then set free. All this; it's a matter of persistent prayer that insists on the need to keep fighting—to keep asking—to keep pursuing.

God knows we're given to sin. God knows our failings and weakness. God knows we're stubborn and deceiving, but God responds to faith and persistence in prayer. God hears and answers. When we trust God with all of our heart, when we lift up our whole self to God and God only and seek refuge in him alone—I believe God will respond to our request.

We must be willing to fight for what we want like Jacob—to not give up, to press forward regardless of what we see, and to relentlessly petition God. It can be exhausting and emotionally draining, but God has this way of working it all for our good. God will indeed change us as we persistently pray. God will indeed bless us as he blessed Jacob. My challenge to you is this. Keep persisting in prayer and keep fighting. Keep asking. Don't give up. Don't give in. Keep fighting. Keep wrestling with God.

Let's pray. Omnipotent God who is bigger and stronger than we could ever imagine, hear our prayer as we wrestle with you. Make a way for our persistence to

continue to be stubborn and strong as we look to you and see your face. Move in us and strengthen us to refuse to let go of you. Amen.