

## August 6, 2023: Tenth Sunday After Pentecost

**Main Idea: When we fight for our relationship with God, God listens and we change.**

The passage from Genesis 32 leaves things ambiguous. Try as they might, scholars cannot say for sure who is wrestling with Jacob until daybreak. Some say it's Jacob's brother, Esau, fighting him for vengeance. Others say it's an angel of the Lord. Still others say he was fighting God's very self. And some contend that he was wrestling a more abstract, metaphorical opponent—his own fear.

Any and all of those could be correct. However, the exact identity of the man might not be necessary to the deeper understanding of the story—namely that sometimes our relationship with God feels like something we have to fight for.

It's clear that Jacob is juggling a specific and challenging mixture of relationships and circumstances when this encounter begins. It doesn't really matter who the man is—it matters more that Jacob leaves the encounter with a blessing. The same can be said for any of us—we are all navigating multiple social spaces and challenges all at once, all of the time. But when it comes to our connection with the divine, those specifics matter less than our ability to trust that we worship a God who can replenish us and protect us and see us through to the other side of conflict. What's important is that we leave our encounters with God with blessings.

We often hear of God fighting for us. It's rarer that we talk about us fighting for God or even with God—us wrestling with the darkness and the evil we see and not understanding how we can reconcile it with the loving creator we know. Those metaphorical wrestling opponents can threaten our faith and force us to try out some new perspectives. But that kind of wrestling can also result in new learnings, catharsis and, ultimately, the chance to negotiate a blessing.

God will always fight for you—this text tells us that God will always want you to fight for God, too.

### Gospel Summary

Crowds throng in ever increasing numbers to see, hear and experience the great teacher/healer. But Jesus resists the impulse to keep the spotlight on himself. If anyone would follow him, they must learn the strength of their own faith, love, and generosity.



# GOD'S WORD for Today

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## First Reading: Genesis 32:22-31

<sup>22</sup>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. <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.

## Psalm: Psalm 17:1-7, 15

## Second Reading: Romans 9:1-5

**9**I am speaking the truth in Christ—I am not lying; my conscience confirms it by the Holy Spirit— <sup>2</sup>I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. <sup>3</sup>For I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my own people, my kindred according to the flesh. <sup>4</sup>They are Israelites, and to them belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises; <sup>5</sup>to them belong the patriarchs, and from them, according to the flesh, comes the Messiah, who is over all, God blessed forever. Amen.

## Gospel: Matthew 14:13-21

<sup>13</sup>Now when Jesus heard this, he withdrew from there in a boat to a deserted place by himself. But when the crowds heard it, they followed him on foot from the towns. <sup>14</sup>When he went ashore, he saw a great crowd; and he had compassion for them and cured their sick. <sup>15</sup>When it was evening, the disciples came to him and said, "This is a deserted place, and the hour is now late; send the crowds away so that they may go into the villages and buy food for themselves." <sup>16</sup>Jesus said to them, "They need not go away; you give them something to eat." <sup>17</sup>They replied, "We have nothing here but five loaves and two fish." <sup>18</sup>And he said, "Bring them here to me." <sup>19</sup>Then he ordered the crowds to sit down on the grass. Taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven, and blessed and broke the loaves, and gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowds. <sup>20</sup>And all ate and were filled; and they took up what was left over of the broken pieces, twelve baskets full. <sup>21</sup>And those who ate were about five thousand men, besides women and children.