



A LOVING AMBUSH

Sermon by
The Rev. Dave Fisher
Genesis 32:3-8, 22-30

A Loving Ambush Genesis 32:3-8; 22-30 Psalm 121

3 Then Jacob sent messengers ahead to his brother, Esau, who was living in the region of Seir in the land of Edom. 4 He told them, "Give this message to my master Esau: 'Humble greetings from your servant Jacob. Until now I have been living with Uncle Laban, 5 and now I own cattle, donkeys, flocks of sheep and goats, and many servants, both men and women. I have sent these messengers to inform my lord of my coming, hoping that you will be friendly to me.'"

6 After delivering the message, the messengers returned to Jacob and reported, "We met your brother, Esau, and he is already on his way to meet you—with an army of 400 men!" 7 Jacob was terrified at the news. He divided his household, along with the flocks and herds and camels, into two groups. 8 He thought, "If Esau meets one group and attacks it, perhaps the other group can escape."

22 During the night Jacob got up and took his two wives, his two servant wives, and his eleven sons and crossed the Jabbok River with them. 23 After taking them to the other side, he sent over all his possessions.

24 This left Jacob all alone in the camp, and a man came and wrestled with him until the dawn began to break. 25 When the man saw that he would not win the match, he touched Jacob's hip and wrenched it out of its socket. 26 Then the man said, "Let me go, for the dawn is breaking!"

But Jacob said, "I will not let you go unless you bless me."

27 "What is your name?" the man asked.

He replied, "Jacob."

28 "Your name will no longer be Jacob," the man told him. "From now on you will be called Israel, because you have fought with God and with men and have won."

29 "Please tell me your name," Jacob said.

"Why do you want to know my name?" the man replied. Then he blessed Jacob there.

30 Jacob named the place Peniel (which means "face of God"), for he said, "I have seen God face to face, yet my life has been spared."

Genesis 32:3-8, 22-30 (NLT)

I will lift up my eyes unto the hills;

From whence comes my help?

My help comes from the Lord,

Who has made heaven and earth.

He will not let your foot be moved,

And he who keeps you will not sleep...

Psalms 121 (New Coverdale Psalter)

Our primary Scripture text today is the Genesis 32 story of Jacob wrestling with a mysterious man in the dark (who turns out to be God!). This is an incredibly ancient and mysterious story, and yet it feels as though we can hold it up as a mirror.

We are looking at a man who is running scared from his own brother because of a rift caused years and years before by his own deception and greed. We are looking at a man who has made all kinds of plans -- layers of plans -- to avoid a disaster that he is sure is coming... and that he turns out to be completely wrong about!

We are looking at a God who meets this man at his lowest point, when he is finally all alone, when everything has been stripped away, in the dark. We are looking at a God who wrestles with this man patiently, at the man's own strength, rather than

overpowering him and breaking him in a moment. We are looking at a God who, although he can't be seen, leaves no doubt of his presence through the giving of a lasting wound along with a blessing and a name.

Jacob is the forerunner of all of the people of God: running scared from our own brokenness... trying again and again to make it in our own strength... unwilling to surrender and trust God. And yet, at the end of the long dark night of wrestling, in God's great patience, we find His blessing freely offered and his mercy evident in our lives.

Running Scared

1. Is part of you running scared from something today?
2. Are you running from sins that are in your own past?
3. Do you believe that God cares even about the messes you have made for yourself?
4. Do you make layers of our own plans to avoid disasters that you are sure are coming?

We can make our plans, but the Lord determines our steps.

5. Ultimately, is our trust in our own plans, or do we know that our help comes from the Lord?
6. Do we believe that God will show up?
7. Do we want Him to show up if we can't ultimately control him?
8. What if we stand to receive a limp along with a blessing?

The Almighty God does not abuse His power.

God humbled Jacob, but first, He wrestled with him at his own strength. God shows patience, not overpowering to break and harm. Instead, God's wrestling is for Jacob's good.

9. What do you notice about the conditions of the moment when God shows up to wrestle with Jacob?
10. Why do you think He chose that moment?
11. When has God met you? Was it in a time of weakness or strength for you?

The Invisible God leaves no doubt of His presence.

There is a theme throughout Scripture (and our lives!) of humanity never being able to see God. In this story, at first we are told that "a man came and wrestled with him" all night. But at the end of the story, Jacob himself sums up the experience with these words: "I have seen God face to face, yet my life has been spared." Jacob leaves the place where God met him with three things: a blessing, a new name, and a limp.

No one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son, who is himself God and is in closest relationship with the Father, has made him known. John 1:18 NIV

12. Do we want God to show up if we can't control him?
13. What if we stand to receive a limp along with a blessing?
14. In the Gospels, where do you see echoes of this wrestling story in Jesus' interactions with people?
15. When in your life have you received something that made you sure it was Jesus who had met you in a dark time?

*** Further Reading ***

Take some time today to read Jacob's prayers and plans that we skipped over in our reading (Genesis 32:9-21), and also what took place when Jacob's brother Esau and his people did finally catch up to Jacob.

*** Further *Listening* ***

In addition to reading and meditating on this story, I recommend listening to Chris Renzema's songs "Jacob" and "How to be Yours," which were inspired by this story from Genesis 32.

