

In preparing today's message about reconciliation... I came across an old but sweet story... that perhaps some of you have heard before. It is about a charming elderly couple who had been married for 60 years. ...

Throughout their life they had shared everything. ... They loved each other deeply. They had not kept any secrets from one another... except for a small shoebox that the wife kept in the top shelf of her closet. ... When they got married... she put the box there and asked her husband never to look inside of it and never to ask questions about its contents.

For 60 years the man honored his wife's request. In fact... he forgot about the box until a day when his wife grew gravely ill... and the doctors were sure she had no way of recovering. ... So the man... putting his wife's affairs into order... remembered that box in the top of her closet... got it down... and brought it to her at the hospital. ... He asked her if perhaps now they might be able to open it. ... She agreed. ... They opened the box... and inside were two crocheted dolls and a roll of money that totaled \$95,000. The man was astonished.

The woman told her husband that the day before they were married... her grandmother told her that if she and her husband were ever to get into an argument with one another... they should work hard to reconcile... and if they were unable to reconcile... she should simply keep her mouth shut and crochet a doll. ... The man was touched by this... because there were only two crocheted dolls in the box. ... He was amazed that over 60 years of marriage... they apparently had had only two conversations that they were unable to reconcile.

Tears came to his eyes... and he grew even more deeply in love with this woman. ... Then he asked about the roll of money. "*What's with this?*" he asked. ... His wife said... "*Well, every time I crocheted a doll, I sold it to a local craft fair for five dollars.*"

In discussing reconciliation... we need to know that offending people is a common occurrence. ... (Therefore... reconciliation is a much needed message within our society.) ... People all around us have been offended and hurt. ... When we offend people... (of course) we KNOW should go to them and apologize and be reconciled to them. ... But few of us ever do. (Few ever initiate the seeking of true reconciliation.) ... This is a selfish world in which we live... and in our selfishness... we insist that the person to come to us... (not us to go to the person.) ... But another reason why we don't seek reconciliation... is because of a fear. ... We fear having to make some sacrifice... in order to be reconciled... or we fear being hurt in so many different ways.

Facing the things we don't want to face... is the lesson we have today in our passage of Scripture. This is a major issue that can move a believer forward in productive ways... or leave him/her stalled and in a kind of limbo. ... Many Christians can find themselves in life's great chasm called '*going nowhere*'... because they refuse to deal with that which holds them back. ... This is especially true in our spiritual walk with God. ... So my prayer this morning is that we would all gain some insight and inspiration from Jacob... and face the things we don't want to face... but know that we need to.

Many times... the issue holding us back from significant spiritual growth and seeing God use us... is our own anger. ... The requirement to overcome it... is forgiveness. ... There may have been times when under tremendous financial pressure... rather than trusting God... we sought to meet our need through deception and lies. ... Another issue may be a desire to hang on to something of this world that God is calling on us to give up. ... Or the issue could be a debt needing to be repaid... in order to restore our integrity... so that our relationship with God may move forward. ... In Jacob's case... he needed to seek to rebuild a relationship that he had been responsible for destroying. ... It was the relationship with his brother (Esau.)

20 years before... (the last time Jacob had seen Esau)... Esau was breathing murderous threats. He was planning to kill Jacob... for stealing his blessing from their father. ... Jacob (now) had to face (in full) the problem that he created by deceiving his father and his brother so many years before.

It is always that way. God cannot possibly bless us with spiritual blessings until we face our trespasses... and put right... (where it lies within our power)... the wrongs we have done. ... God's dealing with old guilt in Jacob's life... reminds us that He will deal with it also in ours.

Jacob must learn to do things God's way. He now faces the requirement of walking through the dark valley of this fearful encounter with Esau. ... There could be no other way to be in the land without fear... except by going past Esau. ... He must face the one person in the world he does not want to face. ... Until he does... his life is 'going nowhere.' ... So God was

telling Jacob, '*You could not trust me to provide the blessing... when you and your mom resorted to deceiving your father in order to get what I had already promised you. ... Now you will learn to trust me the hard way... for you to experience the full blessing*'. ... So Jacob now faced the requirement of walking through the dark valley of this fearful encounter with Esau.

(Let's face it)... we often prefer a God who is a great big candy man... rather than a God who forces us to grow into mature people... don't we...? But God requires us to do the right thing... even when we are afraid.

Will God ever help you and I to overcome our fear to do what is right...? I say "yes!" and I hold Jacob up as an example.

Genesis 32:1-2

As Jacob "*went on his way*" after the meeting with Laban had ended... he was met by a great blessing... (namely... "*the angels of God*" met him.) Jacob called them "*God's host*". ... This was a visible manifestation of heavenly warriors. ... In an extremely frightening moment for Jacob... the presence of the angels assured him that he was doing the right thing... and to comfort him before a difficult encounter with Esau.

One of the most intriguing scenarios in biblical narrative was the times that the saints of God saw angels. ... Some of us may even think that we would love to see an angel. It doesn't need to be a whole army (like Jacob... here. ... But wouldn't it be cool to witness the appearance of a Heavenly being...?)

Well... The visit of angels (whenever we see them in the Bible)... is often the forerunner to a servant of the Lord... who is about to be called upon to do something **extremely difficult**. ... (LISTEN!) The visit of angels has a powerful burden attached. ... Jesus was visited by angels before his crucifixion. Abraham was visited by angels prior to the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. ... Isaiah saw angels in a vision before setting out on the prophetic ministry that would take him through extremely difficult times. ... Jacob saw angels on his way to Haran... and then he experienced 20 very difficult years. Now he sees them again... in leaving Haran... because of this very difficult task before him. ... The presence of the angels did not mean they were going to keep Jacob from his encounter with Esau. They only meant that God would be with him.

The manner of the manifestation was that of an army of God's angelic warriors who were watching over Jacob. This manifestation was similar to the one God gave Elisha and his servant when the Syrian army surrounded them in Dothan (2 Kings 6:15-17). Human eyes cannot normally see God's holy warriors; but when God wishes, He can open man's eyes to see them as he did with Jacob and later with Elisha and his servant. The manner, like the moment, was very appropriate. Jacob needed an army to protect him from Esau, and this manifestation of warriors fit the situation.

The name "*Mahanaim*" (which Jacob named that place)... means "*double host*" or "*two hosts*" or "*two camps*." The two hosts refers to God's hosts and Jacob's host. Jacob's host was not walking alone. ... God was keeping company and providing protection. ... (LISTEN!) Human effort is never sufficient to meet all the challenges that are fundamental to the mission God has designed for you and I. (Let me repeat that: Human effort is never

sufficient to meet all the challenges that are fundamental to the mission God has designed for you and I.) ... We need the protection of God's presence as we carry out God's assignments.

The lesson is clear for us: we must go forth to seek reconciliation when we have offended or harmed someone. God will be with us. He will see to it that we are protected and looked after. His angels are ministering spirits to protect and help us.

Psalm 34:7 (ESV)

The angel of the LORD encamps around those who fear him, and delivers them.

Hebrews 1:13-14 (ESV)

¹³ And to which of the angels has he ever said, "Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet"? ¹⁴ Are they not all ministering spirits sent out to serve for the sake of those who are to inherit salvation?

John Wesley spent fifty-two years in the saddle riding through muck and mire, fronting dangers at every turn as he preached revival to his generation. In those days highways were dangerous places for a lone man. Stage coaches traveled with armed guards, for highwaymen lurked in the hedgerows, and footpads hid behind trees waiting a chance to shoot down the unwary wayfarer. Gibbets were a common sight, set up on the highways as a grim reminder to holdup men that they would be hung if caught, and tarred and left to rot as a warning by the way.

John Wesley was riding one day along a lonely stretch of road when he noticed shadowy forms ahead, forms that vanished behind a hedge almost as his eye took them in. He could not turn back; that was not his way, yet to go on meant danger and possibly death. There was no hope of human help

on that deserted road, so John Wesley prayed. Almost at once he heard hoofbeats coming up behind him, and he turned in his saddle as another traveler rode up alongside. Wesley gave the newcomer a cheery greeting than silently the two spurred on down the path, on past the place where the robbers lay concealed. Seeing two men instead of one, the robbers let them pass. Wesley then turned to say something to his companion, only to discover that there was nobody there! The mysterious rider had vanished into thin air. John Wesley had received an unusual glimpse of his angel escort along the way.

Perhaps if this were a story that you or I were writing as a fiction... we might have Jacob believe God at this point and face his destiny with Esau... having great courage. ... But this was not Jacob. He had forgotten his experience at Bethel (when he saw all those angels ascending and descending a staircase from heaven to earth.) He forgot all of his protection and blessing over those 20 years in Haran. ... Even with the vision of the angel escort still dancing before his eyes... Jacob began scheming and planning again... as he employed his own self-effort... in order to circumvent Esau's fiery rage.

Genesis 32:3-5

Jacob adopted a condescending attitude that wasn't befitting to the man God had chosen to carry on the Abrahamic covenant. ... Sending the messengers was a good idea... but calling Esau "*my lord*" and himself "*your servant*"... and trying to impress Esau with his wealth... was only evidence that Jacob wasn't trusting God to care for him.

Let's stop and observe a contrast. Please recall from last week's passage that Jacob feared his father-in-law (Laban)... and so he left with his wives and belongings ***in secret***... while Laban was away... shearing sheep. He was ***afraid*** of Laban... but when Laban went after him and confronted Jacob... what did Jacob do...? Jacob stood up to him and let him have it with both barrels. Jacob boldly comes forth and speaks of 20 years of injustice that Laban has shown to him. ... And by the time Jacob was through... there was nothing Laban could say... except "*Let's make a peace treaty.*"

Now contrast this with the fear Jacob has toward his brother Esau. It is much different. ... Instead of boldly coming forth to Esau... Jacob grovels before him. Jacob calls Esau "his Lord..." a few times. ... Why does he kowtow to Esau... just after he showed such confidence and courage to Laban...? (In both cases he was struck with fear... but he acts so much different with each.)

I believe that the answer is... because the whole time that he was with Laban... Jacob lived an ***upright*** life before him. ... But that was not the case with his brother Esau. ... Jacob now cowered... because he remembered all the evil he had done. His conscious was convicting him of his wrongdoing.

There are a lot of believers today... who are just like Jacob was (here.) They have guilty consciousness' that keep them immobilized by their past failures. Instead of marching forward with what they know God has asked them to do... they recoil... feeling weak and inadequate. If this describes you... watch and see how God was able to re-purpose Jacob. He can still

use you. He wants to take the memory of your sin that fills you with so much anguish... and put it behind you through His complete forgiveness.

Genesis 32:6-7

The message from Jacob's messengers upon returning from Esau gave Jacob the warning that the encounter with Esau could be a bloody affair. ... Though Jacob's messengers came to Esau with a message from Jacob... they did not receive a return message from Esau for Jacob. ... This looked like an obvious indication of lingering hostility in the heart of Esau for Jacob. ... Along with 400 hundred men accompanying Esau it was an ominous warning of possible trouble for Jacob. (Who needs that many companions... unless they are coming to act with violent force?)

Expecting the worst... Jacob jumped to the conclusion that his brother had come to take vengeance on him and his family. ... A guilty conscience often makes us see the darkest possible picture.

Why did Esau come out to meet Jacob with 400 men? ... I will put before you two possibilities. ... **#1.** Because years before... Jacob had stolen Esau's blessing. Esau may have thought that Jacob was now returning to claim the promised boundaries of the land... and perhaps even to try and make Esau submit to Jacob... as his lesser. ... In the next chapter... we will find out that Esau was no longer angry. ... But (here) he needed to be prepared for anything.

Possibility **#2.** is that Esau had begun to live by the sword (we know this because of Genesis 27:40)... and had surrounded himself with a numerous body of followers. Associated by marriage with the Hittites and the Ishmaelites... he had rapidly risen to the rank of a powerful chieftain. It is

probable that he was accustomed to a strong escort... that he wished to make an imposing appearance before his brother... and that his mind was in a wavering state... (that perhaps the slightest incident might arouse him to vengeance.)

Anyway... Jacob has good cause for alarm.

Already Jacob had forgotten the unseen host that marched with him in the spirit world. Jacob was still scheming... ignoring God... Who was saying... "*Trust me, Jacob.*" Jacob was saying, "*I do trust you, Lord, but—*"

Genesis 32:9-12

Notice first... the God to whom he prayed. ... He did not approach God in an impersonal manner (like "God the Creator")... but instead as "*the God of his father Abraham and the God of his father Isaac.*" ... It was God in *Covenant relationship*. This was laying hold of the Divine faithfulness... It was the prayer of faith. ... We need to approach God the same way. We should appeal to Him on the ground of a sure and established relationship. We are taught through the Lord's prayer to come before Him as our Heavenly Father. ... It is as we plead *this* relationship He is pleased to bless us.

And notice too... that Jacob took a lowly place before the Most High. He owned that "*he was not worthy of the least of all God's mercies.*"

I sometimes wonder if this is the chief reason why there does not seem to be any real power in prayer today. ... We must come before Him as empty-handed supplicants... if He is to fill us. ... We must be ready to receive from Him on the ground of grace *alone*... if we are to have our prayers

answered... and in His grace... God has given us promises that we don't deserve. ... Jacob pleaded the promises of God in his prayer. ... We stand on firm ground in prayer when we can plead the promises of God in our requests. ... We need to become well acquainted with the promises of God if we are to pray properly. Here are just two (of many) which are available for you to claim (write these down and use them):

2 Corinthians 12:9 (ESV)

... "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness."

Philippians 4:19 (ESV)

And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus.

Use these in your praying... in the next hour of emergency that you experience. ... That is always a potent argument with God. ... Take Him boldly back to His promises. ... That is what George Mueller used to do. George Mueller set out to raise a monument in Bristol to the faithfulness of God. He wished to demonstrate to an unbelieving generation that God is the rewarder of those who diligently seek Him. ... Time and time again... Mueller built... staffed... and maintained those great orphan houses of his... and God tested him. ... His biographer, A. T. Pierson, tells how Mueller would pile up arguments in prayer. He would remind the Lord that the orphan houses were *God's*... that the orphans and their needs were *His* responsibility... that *He* was the pledged "Father of the fatherless." Comments Pierson, "*Of course, God does not need to be convinced: no arguments can make any plainer to Him the claims of trusting souls to His intervention, claims based upon His own Word, confirmed by His oath.*"

Then why did George Mueller use such arguments with God? Says Pierson, "*We are to argue with God, we are to argue our case with God, not indeed to convince Him but to convince ourselves.*"

.....

You would think that a prayer with that kind of solid theological content would have brought God's peace to Jacob's heart, but it didn't; and in his restlessness, he decided to act.

I am afraid that we are often in the same position. Many of us take our burdens to the Lord in prayer. We just spread them out before Him -- I do that. Then when we get through praying... we get right up and put each little burden right back on our back... and start out again with them. ... We don't really believe Him... do we? ... We don't really trust Him as we should.

We've already learned that ***faith is living without scheming***. ... But before we call Jacob out on this... we need to examine our own hearts to see if we've ever been guilty of praying piously... and then turning to and depending on our own schemes and resources. Here is what Jacob did:

Genesis 32:13-20

The five distinct groups of animals arriving in succession will wear down the military readiness of Esau's band. If they were planning an ambush... they would have to set it up each time a group arrives. When they discover that Jacob is not in the group... they would all gather again and proceed on their way. ...After five times it is unlikely that they are as alert for combat as

they may have been at first. By that time Esau and his men will probably have given up the idea of an ambush altogether.

And as the gifts arrive, Esau becomes more and more encumbered in his travel. The animals will force him to move more slowly and will make his band much noisier. It will be difficult to take Jacob by surprise given the unavoidable cacophony from the livestock.

Furthermore... as Jacob's servants bring the gifts... they join the march of Esau's band. How effective can any of Esau's intended military strategies be if he has to cope with members of Jacob's household mixed in among his own retinue of soldiers?

But then... another part of Jacob's scheming was his groveling. Clearly, the message which Jacob sent to Esau was utterly beneath the dignity of a child of God... such fawning phrases as "*my lord Esau*" and "*your servant Jacob*" tell their own sad tale. ... This flattering and stooping before such a man of the world as Esau... evidenced the state of Jacob's heart. ... Jacob was *afraid* of Esau... and was no longer exercising confidence in God.

Genesis 32:21-22

These verses reveal what state of mind Jacob was in. He was so terrified that he could not sleep. The picture here is of him being very restless... so he gets his entire family up... has them pack up their belongings and cross the river. Nobody moves at night. It is too dangerous. But fidgety Jacob moved his family – but he stayed alone.

Genesis 32:22-32

We need to notice right away that Jacob was wrestling with God. This is what the concluding verses make clear (vv. 29-31)... and Hosea 12:4 is unmistakable in this identification. Jacob was wrestling with God.

God was his adversary. Until now... this possibility of such a thing had probably never even crossed Jacob's mind. He knew of Laban as an adversary... and certainly Esau would be seen as an adversary. He had shown great fear toward both of them. But God? God was not seen as an enemy. In fact... by what we have read... it seems that (to Jacob) God was a benign... friendly... heavenly Father figure... to whom he could turn... if (and when) things got ugly. But for the most part... God was ignored so that Jacob could run his own life and form his own plans. There was nothing for Jacob to fear about God.

But how wrong Jacob was! He had been using God all along. But now... he was to discover that God is not be used like that. As we talk about Jacob's combat with God... keep this crucial question in the forefront of your mind: Do I need to be changed, like Jacob was? Do I ignore God... thinking I can run my own life and make my own plans... and only call on God... if things get out-of-hand?

It was the darkest night of Jacob's life as he sat alone reflecting on the past and on what the sunlight might bring... alternately shivering in the mountain cold and trembling at the approach of Esau.

Then his heart seized as a hand fastened onto him—a powerful hand. Jacob was in the mighty hold of someone who seemed intent on taking his life. Jacob could see nothing; it was dark. The assailant was silent and

nameless. Who was this? Was it a wandering bandit who wanted his clothing or his sandals? Was it an assassin sent by Esau to murder him? Was it one of Laban's relatives who did not like the resolve that they made?

Jacob... no pushover himself... rose mightily to the occasion. And that long night (six or seven hours?) became one of burning sweat... dripping down his hair and beard... The night must have included long periods of labored breathing... and several bursts of renewed fury... gouging... pulling... tripping... and throwing. And then more rage — and more pain and thirst — and smothering frustration.

Certainly Jacob did not see the wrestling for what it was—a parable of his entire life. Throughout the long narrative... Jacob's life has been characterized as a grasping struggle. Jacob had wrestled with his brother... and then with his father... and then with his father-in-law... and now with God. ... Jacob had spent most of his adult life wrestling with people - including his wives... so God came to him as a wrestler.

What was this about...? What purpose did this wrestling match between God and Jacob serve...? ... It was to reduce Jacob to a sense of his nothingness... to cause him to see what a poor... helpless and worthless creature he was. ... It was to teach us (through him)... the all important lesson... that in recognized weakness lies our strength.

Jacob discovered that he'd spent his life fighting God and resisting His will, and that the only way to victory was through surrender. As A.W. Tozer said, 'The Lord cannot fully bless a man until He has first conquered him.' God conquered Jacob by weakening him.

This injury to Jacob was a dislocated hip. It was a serious injury which would weaken one's ability to wrestle. The crippling of Jacob was not judgment but a test of his dedication. Would difficulties discourage his pursuit of Divine blessings? It does for many, but it did not deter Jacob. That the serious injury could be caused simply by a touch indicated that the One wrestling with Jacob was God. No longer could Jacob wrestle; all he could do was *cling*. The mysterious Stranger brought Jacob to the point where he had to *lean his entire weight on Him!*

God does not play fair. Now... I am not saying that God ever does anything that is sinful or unjust. No. The Lord of the Universe does all things right. He is ultimate perfection. But here is what I mean: God does not play by our rules. His ways are higher than our ways... and He never loses. He is sovereign God. So whether we like the way He plays or not... God will win any contest between you and I. (Like Jacob) We need to submit to this.

Have you ever had your life put out of joint by God? Maybe... suddenly... as if totally out of the blue... you have experienced a loss of a job... or had a severe illness... or some other kind of setback or disappointment. Eventually you saw that God was using it to dislocate you... and bring you to your senses. He impacted your life with the clear message that you need to submit to Him. He needed to teach you that you are powerless (helpless and lame) and all you can do is cling to Him.

One of the principal designs of our gracious heavenly Father in the ordering of our path, in the appointing of our testings and trials, in the discipline of His love, is to bring us to the end of ourselves, to show us our own

powerlessness, to teach us to have no confidence in the flesh, that His strength may be perfected in our conscious and realized weakness.

As always... with God... we have to lose... in order to win.

Genesis 32:27-28

In the context of the Bible... to disclose your name could be an act of self-disclosure... a revelation of your character... your deepest identity. So the assailant asked the question, "*What is your name?*" And he said '*Jacob*'. Here it was a confession of guilt—"I am fraud. I am deceiver. I am supplanter. I am rightly named Jacob, for I cheated my brother twice!". This confession evoked amazing... transforming grace... because instead of merely blessing him... his assailant changed Jacob's name... announcing his new character. "Then he said, '*Your name shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel, for you have striven with God and with men, and have prevailed*'"

There is varied scholarly opinion as to the meaning of "Israel." Some say it means "*he who strives with God and prevails*". Others say it means "*God strives*"... "*God rules*"... "*God prevails*"... But there is another meaning that is just as legitimate... and I think fits the context best – "*God commands*."

Jacob had contended for the blessing and succeeded. ... He had contended with Laban and succeeded. ... He had contended with 'men' and succeeded. ... Now he contended with God (the Wrestler)... and fails. Hence his new name was changed to Israel... "*God commands*"... to teach him the greatly needed lesson of dependence upon God. ... He had learned... and was never to forget this lesson... that it was not he who was

to order and arrange his life's events and concerns - but God! As Israel... God would now command and prevail.

The message of the encounter for Jacob, and for his descendants, the Israelites, and also for us, is that the blessing of God is the work of God. He wants to fight for us, but he might have to fight us to get us to the point of surrendering our wills to him. Self-sufficiency, trying to achieve the blessing by our own strength, will not be successful. If we persist in thinking that it will, God may have to “cripple” our self-sufficiency to make us trust him more.

When God rules our lives, then He can trust us with His power; for only those who are under His authority have the right to exercise His authority.

Just before the explanatory note for why the Jews do not eat the sinew of an animal... our passage closes with the picture of Jacob limping off into the sunrise... to go meet Esau.

This is such a picture of victory! And it describes you and I. We limp. In the world's eyes we are cripples. However – God's strength is made perfect in our weakness... and it is when we appear the weakest... we are actually the strongest.

2 Corinthians 12:9 (ESV)

... *“My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.”*