

AUGUST 2ND – NINTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

DIGITAL PRINT SERVICE: FIRST SACKVILLE PRESBYTERIAN

Call to Worship

Leader: The Lord is faithful in all his words, and gracious in all his deeds.

People: Our eyes look to you, for you give us food in every season.

Leader: The Lord is near to all who call on him in truth.

People: You open your hand, O God, and satisfy the desire of every living thing.

Leader: The Lord fulfills the desire of all who fear him, and watches over all who love him,

People: So our mouths will speak the praise of the Lord, and God's holy name.

Prayer of Adoration

God of mystery, we praise you for the many ways you come to us and offer love and grace. We are here to meet you and offer our praise and prayer, proclaiming our gratitude and seeking a resting place and a healing word. Touch us in this time of worship, O God, that we may become your new creation, rooted in Christ and open to the Spirit. Amen.

Hymn 29 Oh send thy light forth

Prayer of Confession

O God, as we come together we are aware that we have fallen short of the life you desire for us. Hear us as we confess our shortcomings. Through Christ you have shown us the way of compassion, generosity and forgiveness, yet we neglect the suffering of others. We blame and judge in the very moments you call us to act with kindness and mercy. We cling to what we own rather than share our blessings with others. Free us from greed and from grievances. Open our hearts so we may embody the teachings of your Son, our Saviour. Amen.

Mission Capsule – Making Space for a New Generation of Believers

The Well Church in Mississauga, Ont. started with a group of only 13 people. They were drawn together by their deep love of Jesus and a desire to share that love with others. Inspired by a vision to become a welcoming space for second – generation immigrants, they developed a style of evangelism and worship that spoke to those they desired to reach. Since the congregation started worshipping together three years ago, their community has grown and has become a home for many young people who had strayed from the church. Please pray for the Well Church and the many churches in The Presbyterian Church in Canada that are making space for a new generation of believers.

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“Love the Lord your God with all your passion and prayer and intelligence and energy, and love others as well as you love yourself.” Mark 12: 29-31

Hymn 378 Jesus, Jesus, Jesus in the morning

READINGS for August 2 – God speaks through the Scriptures

READING	VERSE	Minister's Message of Reflection
<i>Old Testament</i>	Genesis 32: 22-31	Jacob wrestles with God
<i>Psalm</i>	17: 1-7, 15	Guard me as the apple of your eye
<i>Epistle</i>	Romans 9: 1-5	A cry for justice
<i>Gospel</i>	Matthew 14: 13-21	Feeding more than five thousand

Hymn 209 O love that will not let me go

SERMON: A Nighttime Story

A great deal of the Biblical narrative takes place in broad daylight. Remember what Jesus said: "Look at the birds of the air; consider the lilies of the field." Other than his conversation with Nicodemus which took place at night, Jesus words are generally spoken in the daylight.

So today's gospel story finds Jesus speaking to a large crowd at the shore. It would seem everybody lost track of time and became hungry, for it was getting late. While the disciples think the crowd should go somewhere to get food, Jesus tells them to use what food is available at the shore to feed these people. They only have five loaves and two fish but they feed this large crowd with what they have. To have seen this take place means it happened in the daylight.

The story we heard today from the Old Testament is a night time story. It takes place in the shadows when no one else is around. Jacob sends his wives and children to one side of the river. Then Jacob is alone, until a man wrestles with him. A little imagination on our part can turn this story into our story.

Imagine: A young child is crying in the crib, having been restless for some time. The medication isn't working and the fever has not broken. The cries become louder and it's now three or four o'clock in the morning. What do you do? Wrestling in the dark!

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You toss and turn in bed, unable to sleep. The rumors are out there and you can't change them. You thought those people were your friends, but they have made up a story about you and lied about details. They do not seem in the least remorseful about hurting you. Should you complain to them? You're wrestling in the dark!

You have just learned that one of your fellow workers whom you have known for many, many years has been arrested. You can't believe what people are saying. Some reporters got hold of the story and are anxious to get it in the latest newscast. There is no proof for the accusation against him, and yet so many are willing to convict him. You worry about your friend and how he will hold up. You're wrestling in the dark!

So here we have Jacob totally on his own. He's trying to stay a few steps ahead of Laban, his father-in-law. This Laban fellow turned out to be more trouble than he was worth. Jacob served 20 years working on Laban's farm and gained a few wives and a house full of children.

Jacob tried to get away from Laban but Laban kept pursuing him, until finally they resolved their differences and parted on good terms. Now Jacob finds out that his twin brother Esau is not that far away. Running from Esau was the reason Jacob spent 20 years working for Laban. But he is alone and he worries about Esau. He knows Esau has a long memory. He also knows that Esau has some 400 men with him at his camp. Esau is looking forward to seeing the brother who stole his birthright.

What will Jacob do? We know from his past that he is a schemer. He takes a large number of livestock from his herd and sends them to Esau as a gift, no doubt in hope of softening his brother's attitude.

Then he sends his wives and children across the river. After some 20 years with them, he now decides to think about somebody other than himself. So he gets them to a safe place, especially since his brother has so many men with him. So here he is down by the river alone – totally alone.

But is he really alone? There's somebody else there, and that somebody wrestles with Jacob all through the night. Both opponents hold their ground, seemingly evenly matched. What would wrestling in the dark with God look like?

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When you worry about your child in the crib or your reputation, or your friend, or whatever is consuming your energy and increasing your fear, might you not be wrestling in the dark? Wrestling in the dark with God!

This is not the God who smiles on us in the sunshine, but the God who comes upon us in the dark. The God who has stayed in the shadows, watching and then entering the ring.

Many have wrestled with God in prayer. We remember that Jesus wrestled with God in prayer that night in the garden of Gethsemane before he dies. **“My Father,”** he prays, **“if this cannot pass unless I drink it, your will be done.”** When Jesus prayed like that, according to the gospels, he agonized. Jesus knew that God never makes it easy.

Jacob is wounded. His night time opponent reaches to touch his hip and set it out of joint. Jacob will hobble now for the rest of his life because of his wrestling with God.

There are many people who want a God who makes them feel better, a God who sands away the splinters from the wooden cross, a God in whom there is no struggle, no ambiguity, and no weakness. They want a God who gives success, a God who will never wrestle with anyone, much less wound them, a God who takes all the mystery out of life, a God who exists to help us without challenging us, a God to bless opinions without pushing them beyond prejudices, a God in whom there is no striving, only sunshine.

In her book **“Learning to Live in the Dark,”** Barbara Brown Taylor writes: **“I’ve had enough of sunshine religion. You know, the kind of yellow plastic faith where everything is easy. That always struck me as a fake – simplistic and innocuous.”**

In the match at the river, Jacob has one more move up his sleeve. He grabs hold of his opponent and will not let go. The opponent says, “let me go.” But Jacob refuses and says, “no, not until you bless me.”

They quibble about names. Jacob says, **“What’s your name?”** There is no reply. Jacob asks the question again and once more there is no reply. Jacob is holding on for dear life, and then the other wrestler gives Jacob a new name.

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“You are Israel, the one who wrestled with God and has prevailed.” Then the blessing is provided. The blessing, the name, the wound, strange gifts. They come because Jacob wrestled them down. Jacob, the night before facing his brother, is most vulnerable. He has nothing. No weapons, no possessions, no community. What he does have is the blessing of God as he limps toward the daylight. The struggle has made him a different person. Frederick Buechner in his book, **“The Magnificent Defeat,”** says of the wrestling at the river:

“The darkness has faded just enough so that for the first time he can dimly see his opponent’s face. And what he sees is something more terrible than the face of death – the face of love. It is vast and strong, half ruined with suffering and fierce with joy, the face a man flees down all the darkness of his days until at last he cries out, ‘I will not let you go, unless you bless me!’ Not a blessing that he can have now by the strength of his cunning or the force of his will, but a blessing that he can have only as a gift.

Power, success, happiness, as the world knows them, are his who will fight for them hard enough; but peace, love, joy, are only from God. And God is the enemy whom Jacob fought there by the river, of course, and whom in one way or another we all of us fight – God, the beloved enemy. Our enemy because, before giving us everything, he demands of us everything; before giving us life, he demands our lives – ourselves, our wills, our treasure.”

Israel, the one who wrestled with God, loses the match but wins the blessing, begs for God’s name, but receives a new name himself. He sees the one who loves him so much that he sends him out in the morning limping. That’s what happens when you wrestle with God. Amen.

Prayers:

Loving God, the knowledge we have of you is not something we have found in books; it is not something we have captured with our minds. Rather, it is something that experience has planted and nurtured within us.

O God, what we know about you is beyond what we can say. You are a God beyond all words, a Hope beyond all wisdom. Aware of our needs today, we are reminded by Christ’s compassion that so many others both near and far experience greater struggles. Hear our prayers for the world as we seek your guidance in bringing your love and justice to all.

We pray this day for all who are sick or in pain, that they may have the medical help they need and the gift of healing in body, mind, and spirit.

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We pray for those who are grieving, that they may know the comfort of your presence and find hope in the promises you give them. We remember those whose lives have been changed by this pandemic and ask that your presence be with them in recovery and healing.

We pray for those who are homeless and hungry, and all those experiencing the stress of poverty and economic uncertainty. Give, we pray, those with more resources the confidence to share generously.

We pray for leaders in our country and our communities, as they seek ways to recover well – being in the face of this pandemic. Give them wisdom and courage to make decisions for the well-being of the most vulnerable.

We pray for those who seek to show hospitality to others in their homes, their workplaces, church, and communities, that such generosity may inspire others to help as well.

We pray for all those who represent the face of Christ to others in their daily lives, grant to them strength and patience as they serve others in your name. Lord Jesus Christ, you walk with us through all the days of challenge and celebration. Be our Bread for the journey of life, sustain us and encourage us, no matter what the future holds. Hear us, as we pray together the words you taught us, saying: “Our Father....”

Hymn 648 I'm gonna live so God can use me

BENEDICTION / COMMISSIONING

Neither life nor death, neither things past, present nor future, neither height nor depth, nothing in all creation can separate us from the love of God in Jesus Christ. As we leave this time of worship, let us take the love of Christ with us, that we might remain one with God. Amen.

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