

Tenth Sunday after Pentecost  
06/08/2023  
St Cuthbert's Anglican Church – Tweed Heads

Genesis 32: 22-31	Jacob wrestles with God
Psalms 17: 1-6, 16	Hear me Lord, because I follow you
Romans 9: 1-8	Jesus came through Israel, but those of the promise can become God's children
Matthew 14: 13-21	Jesus feeds 5000

### Introduction

Today I would like to look at our readings from the bible in light of the sentence of scripture set down for today:-

The Lord is near to all who call on him in truth. He fulfils the desire of all that fear him, hears their cry, and saves them.

Psalm 145.18–19

And I would also like to ask the question,

“What might it mean for us to wrestle with God?”

### The Lord is Near

Christians believe, that as human beings, we are created in the image of God. We are all special to God. The bible tells us that when a person accepts Jesus, the Holy Spirit comes to live within them. So as Christians, God is not just near to us, but God comes to dwell within us. It is a very personal experience we can have with God.

In the reading from chapter 9 of Paul's letter to the Romans today, we hear Paul describes those who chose to follow Jesus the “Children of the Promise”, and how he laments that the Jews are not turning to Jesus. This description as “Children of God” gives us an image of a very close relationship with God. It is normal for a parent to love their children. From this it is clear, that God loves us.

I want to invite you to think over the last week. When have you felt that God is near to you? When have you been most aware of God's presence in your life?

It may have been a high point. You may have felt God's presence in hearing some good news, or in witnessing a sunrise. It may have been a low point, like when we call out to God for help. It may have been during a time of prayer. Or, you may be thinking, I haven't been specifically aware of God's presence in the last week. But if we are seeking to follow Jesus in our lives, then we will be aware of God's presence, and we will feel it in our lives.

One thing we can know is that God is near to us. If we are not feeling God's presence, it may be we, who have moved away from God, because God always seeks to be near to us.

## Truth

In our sentence of Scripture today it says that, “The Lord is near to all who call on him in truth.”

But what does it mean to “Call on God in Truth”? I think it means to be sincere in seeking God’s will and not just our own will. But of course, we can all be sincerely wrong.

In this week’s Pew Bulletin Reflection we have these words to help us:-

Lord, hear me and help me. May I always discern and seek reality, and not fall into self-deceptive fantasy, for you are I AM, the ‘Great Reality’.

To call on God in truth, may be very clear to us at times, but there could also be times when we will need to test our calling out to God to discern what really is God’s Truth.

We may have to test what is God’s Truth, by looking at how it matches up with what we find in the bible, or by looking at how it matches up with the guidance of other mature Christians, or by looking at how it matches up with the teachings of the Church, or by looking at how it is helping to build up the Body of Christ, that is the other Christians in community around us.

If what we are calling out to God for, doesn’t match up with these things, then maybe it isn’t God’s truth.

Calling out to God in truth will be an ongoing part of our Christian journey, and if we continue steadfastly, it will no doubt bring us nearer to God.

## Desire and Fear

The next part of our Sentence from Scripture today says:-

“God fulfils the desire of those that fear him.”

Do we fear God? It’s probably an odd concept for many, but it is clear that we are called to Fear God in the Bible. In the Book of Proverbs, we hear that the Fear of God is the beginning of Wisdom.

Given that we know from the New Testament that “God is Love”. I think a better way to put it as that we need to fear the consequences of rejecting God.

If we know to fear the consequences of rejecting God, and if we then make the decision to turn to God and to trust God, then we can know that we are enabled to live lives free from fear. God’s Perfect Love, in fact, drives out all fear.

So, by learning to fear God, we can actually live lives free of fear, and living with God will actually exceed all that we can possibly desire.

This discussion on desire, reminds me a little of a scene from the original Star Wars Movie. Luke Skywalker is trying to convince Han Solo to help him rescue Princess Leia. Luke encourages Han by telling him there will be a big reward. Han asks how big the reward will be. Luke replies bigger than you can imagine, and Han quips back, "I don't know, I can imagine quite a bit." Luke assures him, "you'll get it and more."

That is how it is with us and God. If we chose to fear God, we will actually get back more than we can even begin to imagine or desire.

### God Hears and Saves

The final portion from our sentence of scripture today is:-

"God hears their cry, and saves them."

If we are seeking God's truth in our lives, then there will be in effect a crying out to God in our lives. We hear it in Psalm 17 today. And as we cry out to God and as we trust God, we can be assured of God's salvation in our lives.

This is why Jesus came to earth, this is why we have the overwhelming example of Jesus providing so abundantly in the story of the feeding of the 5000 from Matthew's Gospel today.

As we cry out to God and accept what Jesus has done for us, we can know that God's wonderful salvation which those first disciples witnessed in the resurrection is also available for us here and now.

### Wrestling with God

And what does it mean to wrestle with God? Sometimes I think it will be straightforward to discern God's will for our lives, and sometimes we will need to wrestle with God.

To wrestle with God means to take time to be with God, to discern what we read in the bible, and what we hear in Church, and to figure out how God wants us to put it all into practice in our lives.

Today we heard the story in the Old Testament of Jacob wrestling with God. It was a challenging time for Jacob. He was about to see his brother Esau after many years apart. It was Jacob who had actually deceived his father Issac, and tricked his brother Esau into signing over his inheritance.

In a sense Jacob was wrestling with God not only because of the relationship he had with God, but also with the fact that he had deceived his brother, and he didn't know how things might work out.

We hear in today's Gospel reading how Jesus even had to take time out to be with God. We hear how Jesus went to a deserted place to be by himself. But of course, we know that Jesus wasn't just by himself. He was spending time with God, The Father, in prayer. Even Jesus, in effect, spent time wrestling with God.

## Conclusion

Are we up for the wrestle with God? The analogy we have from the Old Testament reading today is that Jacob was willing to continue to wrestle with God all night until he received a blessing from God.

In our lives, sometimes God's will might be very obvious for us, and sometimes we may need to stay in the wrestle with God, to discern God's will, so that we will be enabled to genuinely live as followers of Jesus. It may sometimes be challenging to stay in the wrestle with God, but it will help produce character in us, and give us the peace of mind that we are doing God's will, and living into the wonderful promises that God has planned for those who love him.

Amen.