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Christ the King & Immanuel Lutheran Churches – Cody & Powell, WY

Lent II – Midweek

February 28, 2024

Text: Genesis 32:22–32

Grace be to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

In the Sermon on the Mount (ch. 6), the Lord Jesus gave His people instructions on how to fast, how to help the poor, and how to pray. As far as the Lord Jesus is concerned, these are the spiritual disciplines His people will keep. In each case, Jesus says, “When you fast...when you give to the needy...and when you pray.” Of the three Christian disciplines, prayer is the one we use most frequently – daily, and the one we are the most familiar with. We don’t fast or give to the poor every day, but we do pray daily, usually several times per day. Throughout my ministry, however, I have been asked more questions about prayer than almost any other theological topic. It’s clear to me, Christians want to know how to pray in a God-pleasing, Biblical way. This is all to the good.

The reading from Genesis 32 provides us with a great example of Christian prayer. This text is helpful in that it reminds us that in prayer we struggle with struggle with God! Jacob did! Vs. 28, “... you have striven with God and with man, and have prevailed.” We may not find this idea very comfortable or appealing. What man or woman can honestly think he or she can overcome God in prayer. The Canaanite woman we heard about last Sunday wrestled with Jesus in prayer on behalf of her demon-oppressed daughter. She prevailed and received Jesus’ commendation, “O woman, great is your faith. Be it done for you as you desire” (Matt. 15:28). May the Lord make us faithful intercessors.

Jacob was returning back to Canaan after his decades-long sojourn in Paddan-aram. During those years, Jacob married Leah and Rachel, had

children, and became quite wealthy. The Lord commanded Jacob to go back to Canaan with the promise that God would be with him (Gen. 31:1).

During the journey back, Jacob learned his brother Esau was on his way to meet him with 400 men. As you may recall, Jacob had cheated Esau from receiving the patriarchal blessing from their father, Isaac. That's why Jacob fled to Paddan-aram in the first place! Esau wanted to kill Jacob. And now, years later, Esau is on his way with a small army. Jacob divided his family into two groups, sent them ahead of him, and remained alone to pray. Genesis 32:24, "And a man wrestled with him until the breaking of the day." This man is the "The Lord of glory, God's Son, who was to become incarnate" (Martin Luther) in the fullness of time through the Virgin Mary. Jacob wrestled with the pre-incarnate Christ. Even as the Canaanite woman of Matthew 15 wrestled the incarnate Christ, the Lord Jesus.

Throughout the night, Jacob wrestled with the man and wouldn't let Him go. As the morning was breaking, the man said, "Let me go, for the day has broken." But Jacob refused, "I will not let you go unless you bless me" (vs. 26). Christ blessed Jacob by giving him a new name, Israel, and by putting his hip out of socket. Every step he took for the rest of his life was a reminder of wrestling with God. Every time someone called him Israel, he would be reminded of the fact he had "seen God face to face, and yet my life has been delivered" (vs. 30).

Israel prevailed over God only by God's grace. It wasn't because Jacob was stronger or smarter than God. Far from it. Jacob prevailed because He believed God's Word and held to it when facing the crisis of meeting Esau and his 400 men. That's the key to wrestling with God and prevailing. Holding onto and believing what God Himself has told you.

The word of promise Jacob held onto was given decades earlier when he left for Paddan-aram. The Lord appeared to Jacob and said (Gen. 28:13-15):

I am the Lord, the God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac...

¹⁴Your offspring shall be like the dust of the earth ... and in you and your offspring shall all the families of the earth be blessed. ¹⁵Behold, I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land. For I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you.

Jacob held fast to God's Word and wouldn't let the Lord off the hook. You promised through me and my offspring to bless all the families of the earth. You promised to bring me back to this land. Hold true to that word as Esau approaches! Bless me as you blessed me before. Be true to Your word, O God of my fathers.

This is how we pray and intercede before the throne of God. This reminds us of the importance of knowing and continuing to learn God's Word.

According to the Scriptures, we know we stand before our heavenly Father through the merits and mediation of His Son by the grace of the Holy Spirit. You do not pray and intercede before God standing on your own merits and worthiness. Such an idea would be the height of pride and arrogance. We pray boldly because the Father commands us to pray and has promised to hear and answer them according to His perfect love and divine wisdom.

Daily life in this world is filled with hardship, opposition, many anxieties, as well as many joys and triumphs. The Bible teaches us that the devil, the world, and our sinful flesh do not want us to hallow God's name or let His kingdom come (Small Catechism). Our spiritual and physical needs are real. We have friends and loved ones who do not confess saving faith in Jesus. Wars and rumors of wars continue to circulate. Personal and familial trials abound. The false doctrines of demons that destroy marriage, family, home, and society continue to spread seemingly unchecked. What are we Christians to do in the face such an onslaught? Pray and intercede. Wrestle with God by holding onto His Word in faith and loving trust knowing that our heavenly Father will work all these things for our good and for His glory.

The Canaanite woman and Jacob are prime examples of intercessory prayer based upon faith in God's Word. As great as those two are, the best example is the Lord Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane. We heard our Lord's intercession in the Passion reading from Mark's gospel. Three times Jesus prayed, "Abba, Father, all things are possible for you. Remove this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will." The intensity was so great that great drops of blood began to flow from the pores of His face (Lk. 22:44). Jesus knew the word and will of His Father. Jesus prevailed in prayer because He submitted to His Father's will leading to crucifixion for the redemption of the world. On the third day, the Father raised Jesus from the dead and gave Him the name that is above all names. He now possesses all authority in heaven and earth.

It is only through Jesus and by holding onto God's Word that we wrestle with God and prevail. What shall we say to all the things we experience in life? God's Word interprets them and guides us through them. One example will suffice. Romans 8:31b-39, "If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?" Through faith in Jesus, the Father stands with us and promises us all good things. The basis of this promise?

"Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us." The crucified and resurrected Christ prays with us, for us, and through us. In this promise, we can pray confidently to our Father, "For I am sure that neither death nor life ... nor things present nor things to come ... nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord." The Lord bless your prayers offered in His name for the good of all people.

✠ In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. ✠ Amen.

Now the peace of God which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus unto life everlasting. Amen.