

Oct. 16, 2022

Pr. Steve

Texts: Genesis 32: 22-31; Luke 18: 1-8

The story of Jacob in the Jabbok is incredible. He is there and this creature (the text really isn't clear. Is it an angel? Is it God?) comes and wrestles with Jacob all night long. And when the dawning sun begins to rise, the creature says, "Let go of me!" Jacob refuses and says, "I will not, until you bless me!" The creature agrees and says, "Very well, from now on your name shall be Yisrael.)" Say it with me, Yisrael--one who wrestles with God. That's what it means--to wrestle with God. The creature touches Yisrael's hip, dislocates it, and leaves.

The story and its mystery is so profound that we dare not explain it away. But all of you already know this story from the inside. You know those times in your life, when you've wrestled and struggled, whether it's with God, or darkness, or life, or hope--you know what that's like.

And you know those times when you've come through, because it's like a new day arriving, and a new sense of identity. And whether others know it or not, you know the truth of what you've experienced. You can never deny it, and you live with it the rest of your life.

'We, women of the world.

Why do you live in a dangerous precipice so high?

Why must you risk our lives?

*We raise the flock, we break the bread,
we pray for the dead.*

*Who holds you when you're old and weak
And loves you like before.*

Afraid alone at the end of your days still you go on speaking of war!

*You cannot mask our beauty. You will not cover us in shame.
We will not veil our eyes from all we see
We will not veil our eyes.*

*We must teach the children now
and feed them with such love.*

We women of the world.

It's up to you--now.' [From 'We Women of the World' by Ajaya Davidson]

It's up to we now.

Can you name for yourself one woman who has loved you into being? Mother, sister, friend, mentor, guide, professor... I don't care. Has everybody got at least one woman in mind? Let us say their names together now.... [Phyllis] They're with us right now, and they have created such beauty in this circle of life.

Women are emerging in new ways these days. It's been going on for decades. Truthfully, it's been going on for centuries, but much more quietly. Women are emerging in the way they think, and feel, sense, experience, believe, trust, explore. This is called 'wrestling with God'--that's what this is. But, it is so easy to rob women, and squash women, of all the meaning and significance they're experiencing. And the preferred simple weapon is this--trivialization.

'You're kidding me, you think that matters? '

'Why would you think that? Nobody else is saying that.'

'Where do you come up with such things? '

'There's no cash value in those ideas.'

Mahsa Amini.

Say her name--Mahsa Amini. 22 years old...and murdered--because she didn't cover her hair properly. And now more than 150 people have been murdered in Iran by the morality police in the last month alone.

You know, the morality police are operating here in our country, too, don't you?

'Cover your hair.' *'Cover your head.'* *'Cover your mouth'.* *'Cover your mind.'*

'Cover your heart.' *'Cover your love.'* *'Cover your body.'* *'Cover your truth'.*

'Cover up!'

That's why Jesus tells the story of the widow today. Against all odds, she goes to this corrupt and complacent judge--pestering, wrestling, demanding, pummeling him like an old boxer--until the judge finally gives way.

That's what a life of prayer is all about. Prayer is not one of these religious things you do--on that religious list you keep at home--you know, important religious things to do now and then. No, prayer is wrestling, struggling, pummeling God, life, so that we can see things in a new way, so that we are given the courage to never lose heart.

Stella, [the toddler who was just baptized] say her name. Stella. Now, summon up all the love you've got in your heart, and say her name again. Right to her. All the love. Here we go. '*Stella*'. (I'm just glad Marlon Brando didn't come to worship today.) She has been given to us. She is God's gift to us to encourage healing and understanding on this planet. That's what all of us are doing here.

"And you are baptized today, little one, to enter the life of Christ so that you may know in your soul that you are a beloved daughter of God forever."

And that she may have the courage to wrestle and struggle with God. And that she may dis-cover who she is.

If you want to know who someone is--woman, man, child--don't ask 'Where do you live?' 'What do you eat?' 'Who's your dentist?' No. Ask '*What do you live for? What do you long for? What do you love?*' And ask, '*What prevents you from living fully and freely into the beautiful beings that you already are?*'

Amen.

The peace, which surpasses all human understanding, keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.