

Dear Friends,

GENESIS 32: 25-28

Jacob is on the way to a reunion with his brother Esau. He is dreading it. Years ago, Esau planned to kill him. Does he still have that intention? May he murder not only Jacob but also his wives and children? Jacob has sent his family and all he has ahead. He is left alone at the river Jabbok. In the dark a stranger has emerged. They wrestle with each other.

The bout continues, through the dark of the night, almost until daybreak. Jacob does well. He holds his own. But his opponent seems to be holding back and giving him a chance. When he chooses, he just gives Jacob the merest touch and puts his hip out of joint. Jacob is not going to win this one. You can't wrestle with a dislocated hip. He has little energy left, but with what he has, he holds fast to his opponent.

The stranger says, "Let me go, for the day is breaking".

Jacob replies, "I will not let you go unless you bless me". In the past Jacob struggled to get his father's blessing. Now he struggles to get the blessing of this stranger.

The stranger says, "What is your name?" Your name in the Bible is the truth about you, who you are in your heart of hearts, in the depths of your being. Jacob is being asked to say who he is. Perhaps he remembers the moment when his father said to him "Who are you?" On that occasion he lied. He said "I am Esau". Will he now own up, face who he is, come clean about what he has made of himself?

He does. In response to the question "What is your name?" he says "Jacob". "That's who I am, Jacob. Here, left alone, in the dark, without my family and my stuff. This is me. Jacob. Jacob the wrestler, the struggler, the wheeler and dealer the manipulator. Jacob".

The stranger says "You shall no longer be called Jacob but Israel for you have struggled with God and humans and have prevailed". In Bible times, Israel the nation looked back on this after victories and defeats, triumphs and humiliations and they thought, "Yes, that's what life is like; life with God is not cosy but a struggle". Perhaps we look at our own lives and feel the same.

Jacob is just about holding on. His hip is out of joint. He has shared the truth about himself. He still has hopes of getting something out of this match. He still wants to receive the stranger's blessing. He would also dearly like to know the stranger's name. Then, when this is over, he must take a deep breath and go on to meet his brother.

God bless you,

Tony