

Dear Friends,

GENESIS 32: 29-32

The moment of Jacob's encounter with his brother Esau is coming. Esau may have murderous intentions. He may be intent on slaughtering Jacob and his family. Or time may have healed his anger and the brothers may meet in peace. Jacob has sent gifts to Esau in the hope that they will appease him and bring him to accept Jacob.

Meanwhile Jacob has been wrestling with a stranger. Jacob's hip is out of joint, but he is still holding on to his opponent. He has asked for the stranger's blessing. He has not yet received it.

Jacob has owned up to his own name, now he says "Please tell me your name".

The stranger replies, "Why is it that you ask my name?" Maybe his name is too wonderful for Jacob to hear or understand.

Charles Wesley wrote a hymn about this story. He saw it as an image for his own struggle to know God. In the early verses he keeps repeating this line, "I will not let thee go, till I thy name, thy nature know". The moment comes when he feels as though he gets more of an answer than Jacob got. Jacob was not given a name. But Wesley looks at God as God is revealed in Jesus and comes to this conclusion, "Thy nature and thy name is love". Life with God may not always be comforting or uplifting, sometimes we may feel as though we are wrestling, struggling with God. But this we may know, whatever we go through, God's intention is for our well being and happiness, because God's nature and name is love.

At last, the stranger gives Jacob the gift which he has been struggling all his life to get. He gives him his blessing. And Jacob left all alone again comes to this conclusion "I have seen God face to face, but I have not perished, my life has been saved".

The sun rises. Can you remember that I invited you to look out for this moment? We noticed the sun set when Jacob left the promised land, just before he had his dream of the stairway to heaven, the dream in which he met with God. Since then the sun has not been mentioned. Now it appears again. Jacob meets with God and the sun rises once more as he travels back into the promised land.

Jacob walks on. Following the wrestling match, he walks with a limp. The experience has left a mark which will stay with him for the rest of his life. Life in general and especially life with God leaves its mark. For Jacob, life has taken him away from his family; he has lived with a dread of the rage of his brother; soon the wife he loves will die and he will experience grief; after that he will live believing that his favourite son is dead and he will experience more grief. Life leaves its mark. It leaves you limping. You live with the things that have happened to you, things which are not your fault, things that leave you feeling sad or disappointed. You live

also with the consequences of the mess you make, the things you've done that you ought not to have done, the things left undone that you ought to have done. There is always forgiveness, but we also bear the consequences of the lives we've lived. We walk on limping like Jacob.

And what wounded Jacob limps towards is the meeting with his brother. A meeting which he dreads.

God bless you,

Tony