

Dear Friends,

GENESIS 33: 1-17

Jacob has wrestled, maybe with God. He has come out of the encounter with a limp. He has re-joined his family. Now, he looks up and sees the brother that he fears coming towards him with 400 men. It is a terrifying sight. The safety of Jacob and his family is under threat. They could all perish. Jacob needs to do what he can to protect them.

He lines them up. Leah and Rachel's maids with their children at the front; after that, Leah with her children; then Rachel with her children; one of those, Joseph is placed last of all. Jacob makes no secret of his favourites. He puts them at the back so that if Esau attacks, they will have the best chance of getting away. The least favoured become human shields protecting the most favoured. Jacob does at least put himself at the front. He walks ahead bowing down to Esau.

Many years before, Isaac, their father blessed Jacob. He thought he was blessing Esau but he had been deceived. He blessed Jacob with these words, "Be lord over your brothers, and may your mother's sons bow down to you". In this moment however it's Jacob who bows down to Esau.

And now, at last, they can see each other. Esau is getting nearer. Will this be another wrestling match? Will this be another battle? Perhaps this time a battle to the death? Esau runs towards Jacob. He takes hold of Jacob. But this is not a wrestling hold. This is an embrace. The brothers who have been so long apart kiss one another and weep. Jacob described the experience of wrestling with God as seeing God face to face. Of his meeting with his brother he says, "To see your face is like seeing the face of God". That's a good example. See the face of God in each person you meet; receive from them as though you are receiving from God; give to them as though you are giving to God.

Jacob and Esau meet as friends, but the old wrestling continues. Jacob tries to offer Esau gifts. Esau says, "Keep your gifts. I have enough". If Esau says he has enough then Jacob has to go one better. He urges Esau to receive the gifts saying "I have everything I want". If Esau has enough, then Jacob has to have everything he wants.

Esau would like to travel together with Jacob. He says, "Let us journey on our way and I will go alongside you". But Jacob prefers for each to go their own way. Which they do. They have made their peace. They part as friends.

Now all that remains for Jacob is to watch as his children grow and to hope that they never fall out, as he fell out with his brother; to hope that none of them will plan to murder any of the others. Especially he hopes that no harm will fall upon Joseph, his favourite, that would break his heart, life would no longer be worth living. He would like to give Joseph a special gift, an ornamented coat to show that he is his favourite. No harm could come from that could it?

God bless you,

Tony