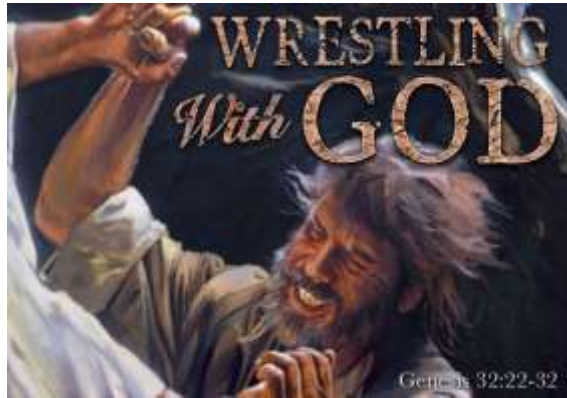


10TH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

AUGUST 6, 2023



ST. JOHN UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

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Fairview Heights, IL
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Pianist – Lisa Cleveland

Liturgy – Rev. Lavon Bayler

Communion Liturgy – Rev. Thomas Shuman

***RESPONSIVE CALL TO WORSHIP:**

ONE: Come into the presence of God to be fed.

Come to call on God, who is eager to answer.

MANY: We gather to seek God's face.

Let our eyes see all that is right and true.

ONE: Incline your ears to hear all God would teach.

Seek to experience God's steadfast love.

MANY: We are here to receive God's blessing.

God is our refuge in a frightening world.

ONE: God is near to all who call and seek.

Come to praise God and receive a blessing.

MANY: Open all our senses to pay close attention, O God.

We want to renew our covenant with the living God.

***INVOCATION:** We are in awe before you, O God, for you have provided for us in rich abundance. The earth is full of your provisions. There is beauty all around us from the work of your hands. You have surrounded us with people who care about us with the love of Christ. Help us, O God, to count our blessings. Point us beyond our cries and complaints that we might realize our capacity to act in your name for the sake of others. As we wrestle with issues of faith and trust help us to risk our false security for the venture of feeding others in the Spirit of Christ. Amen.

***CALL TO CONFESSION:** All of us need times of wrestling with God over issues in our lives. These moments of confession offer us one such opportunity. Bring your own distress to this time of confessing the sin in which all of us have a part.

***UNISON PRAYER OF CONFESSION:**

God of justice and righteousness, whose compassion for humankind was expressed so vividly in Jesus of Nazareth,

we bring to you our sorrow and anguish that we have not followed faithfully in the footsteps of Christ. Unkindness and deceit are all around us, and we have sometimes joined in their destruction ways. We waste resources you have entrusted to us. We cause others to stumble and fall. Take away our wickedness, O God, and restore your covenant among us, we pray in Jesus' name.

Silence for personal confession.

***ASSURANCE OF PARDON:** God is merciful, patient, kind, and loving. All creation is subject to God's care and concern. God attends to our cries and frees our lips from deceit. In Christ, our brokenness finds healing, and relationships are mended and strengthened. God feeds us in ways beyond our knowing and prompts our generosity. Know the glory of God surrounding us here as we worship. Celebrate the refreshment God offers.

Praise the Lord. We are forgiven!

***GLORIA:**

Glory to the Creator, and the Christ and the Spirit so near. As it was from the start so it shall be forever, One God always here. (repeat two more times.) (end) One God always here. One God always here.

SCRIPTURE LESSON from the Old Testament:

Genesis 32:22-31 Jacob wrestles with God

²² Jacob got up during the night, took his two wives, his two women servants, and his eleven sons, and crossed the Jabbok River's shallow water. ²³ He took them and

everything that belonged to him, and he helped them cross the river. ²⁴ But Jacob stayed apart by himself, and a man wrestled with him until dawn broke. ²⁵ When the man saw that he couldn't defeat Jacob, he grabbed Jacob's thigh and tore a muscle in Jacob's thigh as he wrestled with him. ²⁶ The man said, "Let me go because the dawn is breaking." But Jacob said, "I won't let you go until you bless me." ²⁷ He said to Jacob, "What's your name?" and he said, "Jacob." ²⁸ Then he said, "Your name won't be Jacob any longer, but Israel, because you struggled with God and with men and won." ²⁹ Jacob also asked and said, "Tell me your name." But he said, "Why do you ask for my name?" and he blessed Jacob there. ³⁰ Jacob named the place Peniel, "because I've seen God face-to-face, and my life has been saved." ³¹ The sun rose as Jacob passed Peniel, limping because of his thigh.

EPISTLE LESSON: Romans 9:1-5

The tragedy of Israel's unbelief

9 I'm speaking the truth in Christ—I'm not lying, as my conscience assures me with the Holy Spirit: ² I have great sadness and constant pain in my heart. ³ I wish I could be cursed, cut off from Christ if it helped my brothers and sisters, who are my flesh-and-blood relatives. ⁴ They are Israelites. The adoption as God's children, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the Law, the worship, and the promises belong to them. ⁵ The Jewish ancestors are theirs, and the Christ descended from those ancestors. He is the one who rules over all things, who is God, and who is blessed forever. Amen.

MESSAGE: “Struggling with God”

It seems that Jacob is always on the run from people who said Jacob cheated them. After cheating his brother out of his inheritance and blessing, Jacob ran to Mesopotamia from Canaan from the fear of his brother seeking revenge. We had the story of Jacob’s dream of angels climbing up and down a ladder. Today’s passage takes place on the boundary of the land as he is returning to Canaan. This time he is being chased by Laban, the father of Jacob’s wives, Leah and Rachel. Laban believes Jacob cheated him out of some live stock. So he is chasing Jacob to get revenge just as Esau is chasing Jacob for revenge. Jacob knows he is about to meet his brother Esau.

Jacob experiences another nocturnal struggle at the Jabbok River, but the immediate context is his conflict with his brother. This is a story of struggle with superhuman powers framed by a confrontation between brothers.

Brief as it is, the story of Jacob at the Jabbok is strange and complicated. Some of its strangeness and complexity in terms of the history of its transmission and development. Scholars think there is strong evidence that the tradition was passed down in the oral tradition in various forms.

We begin to recognize that evidence when we attempt to identify Jacob’s wrestling opponent. Initially we are told that “a man wrestled with Jacob until daybreak”, but later it appears that the opponent has the power both to put Jacob’s thigh out of joint with a touch and to bless him.

This confusion along with the facts that the opponent fears the daylight and refuses to divulge his name, suggests

a nocturnal demon. In the struggle, the opponent declares ambiguously that Jacob has “striven with God and with humans” and in the end Jacob says he has “seen God face to face.” It seems that the narrator of this story has taken over an ancient, pre-Yahwistic tradition that once talked of a nocturnal demon or deity and reinterpreted it as a confrontation between Israel’s God and her ancestor.

Another interesting part of this story is when Jacob’s opponent changes Jacob’s name or, more likely, the giving of an additional name. This emerges directly from the struggle. The name Israel means “one who strives with God,” or “God strives.”

Now, let’s take another look at our scripture lesson from Romans. Paul has written many, many years after Jacob’s wrestling match, his anxiety over the nation of Israel’s general failure of the Jews to accept Christ. Paul wrestles with the question of how the inclusion of the Gentiles within the people of God affects the destiny of Israel. The fact was that the gospel had been received more warmly by Gentiles than Jews; indeed it had met outright rejection by many Jews. Not only the message about Jesus, but Jesus himself had been resisted and rejected by Israel.

Paul struggles with this dilemma created by Israel’s rejection of the gospel. It appears that the divine promise (*which we have talked about every Sunday this summer*) was never intended to extend to Jews only, but was always meant to include everyone whom God chose, including Gentiles. Even when the promise was directed to Jews, not all Jews responded which shows that all along the promise

came not through birth but **through faith**. Historically, God had called people to be obedient and Israel was no exception. The same call **now** comes anew through Christ; we are to respond to God in faith. But Israel has yet again failed to hear God's call.

Yet God has not given up on Israel. **And God has not given up on us either. Though we may struggle as Jacob did, God is always there for us.** Amen

***HYMN: NCH 783 "As the Grain of Wheat"**

PASTORAL PRAYER: High and holy One who inhabits eternity, in Christ you have come down to those who are contrite and humble in spirit. By the grace of the Holy Spirit help us feel your living presence. Refresh your people who are overworked and weary.

Bless all who have blessed each of us in some way whether we know who they are or not. If we are estranged from anyone, reconcile us by the forgiving Spirit, that all bitterness and hostility may be removed and the unity of the Spirit be manifest in the bond of peace. Deliver the innocent from temptations too hard for them to bear, and support those on the verge of losing faith and giving up the good fight.

Send true comforters to those who are suffering from the malice of others or by the mistreatment of the careless; any who have been misjudged and misunderstood; and those who are victims of injustice and oppression because of their race, their religion, or their sex. Hasten the day of liberty and justice for all.

Be near, O Lord, to the sick and the suffering. Uphold all who are bearing pain and loss bravely, both the afflicted and those who care for them. Help them as they have need, and give them reason to rejoice in Christ our Savior.

We pray, Compassionate Christ, for your healing Spirit to assist psychiatrists, psychologists, counselors, and mental health workers who work with those who suffer from mental illness.

We pray for all those workers who give aide to those affected by the recent storms; all the workers who restart our electricity, cut down trees that fell on power lines and houses, and those who give shelter to the families whose houses were too damaged to return to.

Thank you, most holy One, for keeping us in the palm of your hand and loving us unconditionally. We are most thankful for your Son who taught us to pray . . .

LORD'S PRAYER:

Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors. Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever. Amen.

INVITATION TO GENEROSITY: God has created a world of abundance for everyone. Yet many do not share in the bounty. Christ calls us to find sufficiency among us and to make sure that all are fed. We give as we have been blessed.

***UNISON OFFERTORY PRAYER:**

Thank you, God, for all you have given to satisfy our needs. You quench our thirst and alleviate our hungers when we turn to you. You turn scarcity into plenty and give us the opportunity to help others. May our offerings proclaim your goodness and mercy. May they be devoted to extending the beloved community of your people. Keep our words and actions attuned to your will, that we may offer to all what they need from your hand. Amen.

HOLY COMMUNION:

May the Table-setting God be with you.

And also with you.

Lift your hungry hearts to our God.

We offer them to the One who feeds us with grace.

God gives us all we need in every moment.

Our mouths will sing God's praise in these moments.

When the hour was late, you spoke, Steadfast Love, and creation sprang forth in newness: tadpoles stretching into bullfrogs; caterpillars crystallizing into butterflies; raindrops plopping on broad leaves; thunder rolling through the valleys, and you shaped us in your image.

If we had listened to you, we would have feasted on Eden's delights, but we hungered for sin's moldy bread, and drank death's sour wine.

With great love and unceasing hope, you sent the prophets to us, but we sent them away for the hour was too early to follow you. Then, in overwhelming compassion, you sent Jesus to us.

With those who have been fed by your love, with those who drink deeply of your joy, we lift our songs of thanksgiving to you:
Holy, holy, holy are you, God of gracious love.

All creation rejoices in you.

Hosanna in the highest!

Blessed is the One filled with great compassion.

Hosanna in the highest!

You are gracious and merciful, Holy God, and Jesus Christ is your heart made flesh. He, who had everything, came to fill those who had nothing. He, who lived in glory, came to the deserted places of our hearts to love us.

He, who is over all, came to submit to death's power, being cut off from you, until you raised him to new life.

We need not go away empty, but are fed at the Table, where we speak the truth in Christ:

Christ died, the witness to obedience;

God raised Christ, the witness to the resurrection;

Christ will come, the witness to the promises to us.

Here at this Table, God of abundance, you feed us with that grace and peace which is offered at no cost to us.

The Holy Spirit blesses the bread, breaks it, and gives it to us so we might have the strength to hold those whose knees wobble from fear and despair.

The Holy Spirit blesses the cup, pours it, and gives it to us so we can go to lift up the hopes which the world has dashed to the ground. The Holy Spirit will gather up the broken people to create a community of wholeness.

And when the final hour is now, when we are gathered with

our sisters and brothers of every time and place, we will eat and be filled at the Lamb's Supper, and rejoice with one voice as we praise you forever and ever. Amen.

SHARING THE ELEMENTS:

***UNISON PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING:**

Eternal God, we thank you for your presence in the simplicity and splendor of this holy meal. By the power of your Holy Spirit, unite us with all whom Christ welcomes, that we may be the servant church of the servant Christ, in whose name we pray. Amen.

***BENEDICTION:** Go out to wrestle with God and the world this week. Call on God in times of need. Listen for the answers God supplies. Never forget that God is with you every minute of every hour of every day. Thanks be to God. Amen.

PRAYER LIST: