

## Sunday 2<sup>nd</sup> August 2020

This short act of worship has been prepared for you to use whilst we are unable to use Methodist Church premises. If you are well enough why not spend a few moments with God, knowing that other people are sharing this act of worship with you.

### Opening Prayer

Calm me, Lord, as you calmed the storm;  
still me, Lord, keep me from harm.  
Let all the tumult within me cease;  
enfold me, Lord in your peace.

David Adam (1936-2020)

Reproduced from Singing the Faith –  
number 624

### Hymn: **Help us O Lord to Learn** **(Singing the Faith 501)**

Sing/ Read /pray /proclaim the words or listen to it here

<https://youtu.be/Lb5-0Rex6uM>

Help us, O Lord, to learn  
the truths your word imparts,  
to study that your laws may be  
inscribed upon our hearts.

Help us, O Lord, to live  
the faith which we proclaim,  
that all our thoughts and words and  
deeds  
may glorify your name.

Help us, O Lord, to teach  
the beauty of your ways,

that all who seek may find the  
Christ,  
and make a life of praise.

*William Watkins Reid (b. 1923)*

### Prayer:

God of our going out and our  
coming home, I worship you today.

For the times and places that have  
filled me with joy, I praise you.

Where I have chosen the wrong  
path and caused pain to myself, to  
you and to others, I ask your  
forgiveness.

For the assurance that you will walk  
beside me to forgive me and restore  
me, I thank you.

### Today's Reading from the Old

**Testament:** Genesis 32:22-31

### Genesis 32:22-31

#### Jacob Wrestles at Peniel

The same night he got up and took  
his two wives, his two maids, and  
his eleven children, and crossed the

ford of the Jabbok. He took them and sent them across the stream, and likewise everything that he had. Jacob was left alone; and a man wrestled with him until daybreak. When the man saw that he did not prevail against Jacob, he struck him on the hip socket; and Jacob's hip was put out of joint as he wrestled with him. Then he said, 'Let me go, for the day is breaking.' But Jacob said, 'I will not let you go, unless you bless me.' So he said to him, 'What is your name?' And he said, 'Jacob.' Then the man said, 'You shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel, for you have striven with God and with humans, and have prevailed.' Then Jacob asked him, 'Please tell me your name.' But he said, 'Why is it that you ask my name?' And there he blessed him. So Jacob called the place Peniel, saying, 'For I have seen God face to face, and yet my life is preserved.' The sun rose upon him as he passed Penuel, limping because of his hip.

### **Time to Reflect**

An enduring cliché from the world of movies is the portrayal of the happy ending in spaghetti-western

movies, with the hero walking off into the sunset satisfied that order has been restored and everyone can now live in peace and harmony.

This was brilliantly parodied by John Sullivan in the *Only Fools and Horses* Christmas Special (1996) when the Trotters finally become millionaires: the episode ends with Del-Boy, Rodney and Uncle Albert walking off into the horizon as the sun sets. At the time, it was thought that this would be the final episode of the long-running and popular comedy, but as it turned out, the show not only returned, but so did the characters' troubles. Their moment in the sun had turned out to be temporary and Sullivan captured the experience of many of us, that there are rarely easy answers to life's struggles.

Today's Old Testament reading ends, not with Jacob walking towards the sunset but towards the rising sun. It is not the story of a hard day's work successfully completed, but of a night-time of wrestling that resolves some questions but leaves others still open. His opponent refuses to offer him easy answers so whilst there is blessing for Jacob, things are not neatly tied up.

Jacob, plans to spend the night alone preparing for his

uncomfortable reunion with his brother, Esau. Given their history, we might expect that he was always going to have a disturbed night. Choices from long ago are still having an impact on his life and his family's. After years of ducking and diving, Jacob seems to have come close to the end of his own resourcefulness but there is still something that wants to turn events to his advantage.

Into this scene walks the unexpected stranger. Later Jacob understands that he had been joined by God as he struggled with his past. What follows shows us that Jacob is not entirely ready to give up the fight and his mysterious opponent, seeing that Jacob is willing to fight to the end, delivers a decisive blow. It is at this point of vulnerability that Jacob opens up to a moment of unvarnished self-awareness and unexpected God-awareness.

Jacob demands a neat and tidy resolution which his companion refuses to give to him. Instead, from the struggle, Jacob is offered the opportunity of a new beginning. A new name, a new blessing (a blessing of his own and not one stolen from Esau) and a new insight to God's presence and God's nature of love.

So, for Jacob, there, with the rising sun, comes hope to follow a night of uncertain and painful struggle. But there is challenge too: he has to reconcile himself to the fact that some of the scars and wounds of a lifetime of wrestling will travel with him into the new day.

God has confronted him with his past and offered him a better future but his history will not be rewritten. He is offered a future shaped by God's faithful provision (rather than his own manipulative gains) and reconciliation (rather than the uncertainty of unresolved conflict). He will limp towards the future less certain of his own strength and more aware of God's presence.

The fantasy of walking off into the sunset is appealing because we would all like neat endings. Sometimes though, God challenges us to embrace new beginnings whilst carrying the memory of our tangled past. Facing up to our past in order to be ready for God's future may involve some painful wrestling with uncomfortable truths, but in the struggle we can find God's presence and God's blessing. Our story, God's story has not ended yet. May you see God's face and live.

Take a time to sit quietly

**A time of prayer**

Ever-present God, I join my prayer  
with all those who pray in the name of  
Jesus today:

We pray for your church that you grant  
us patience as we continue to the  
work we need to do to prepare for  
future gatherings together.

For those who are anxious about the  
future and those who see only threat  
in the days to come.

For those who are estranged from  
loved ones and feel they are unable to  
do anything to bring about  
reconciliation.

For those who wrestle in the night  
with trouble and distress of body,  
mind and soul.

I pray especially for ...

Holy God,  
help us to show others that you are  
present in the midst of their struggles,  
that together we might demonstrate  
your great love and concern for your  
world.  
In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

**The Lord's Prayer**  
*Our Father .....*

**Hymn: Listen to Oh My Soul –  
Casting Crowns -**  
<https://youtu.be/3Dli0DRq6ww>  
**or sing a verse of a hymn that  
comes to mind**

### **A prayer of blessing**

Power of God, be our protection;  
wisdom of God, be our guide;  
word of God, be our inspiration;  
shield of God, be our defence;  
hosts of God, be our deliverance;  
Son of God be our salvation;  
now and always. Amen

St Patrick's Breastplate, Book of  
Armagh (9<sup>th</sup> Century)

Original Materials by Rev.d Dalwyn  
R Attwell

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