

# Leavening Methodist Church

## Thought for Sunday, 2<sup>nd</sup> August (Steve Langton)

### Genesis 32:22-31

*<sup>22</sup> That night Jacob got up and took his two wives, his two female servants and his eleven sons and crossed the ford of the Jabbok. <sup>23</sup> After he had sent them across the stream, he sent over all his possessions. <sup>24</sup> So Jacob was left alone, and a man wrestled with him till daybreak. <sup>25</sup> When the man saw that he could not overpower him, he touched the socket of Jacob's hip so that his hip was wrenched as he wrestled with the man. <sup>26</sup> Then the man said, 'Let me go, for it is daybreak.' But Jacob replied, 'I will not let you go unless you bless me.' <sup>27</sup> The man asked him, 'What is your name?' 'Jacob,' he answered.*

*<sup>28</sup> Then the man said, 'Your name will no longer be Jacob, but Israel, because you have struggled with God and with humans and have overcome.'*

*<sup>29</sup> Jacob said, 'Please tell me your name.' But he replied, 'Why do you ask my name?' Then he blessed him there. <sup>30</sup> So Jacob called the place Peniel, saying, 'It is because I saw God face to face, and yet my life was spared.'*

I had forgotten how much there is about Jacob in the book of Genesis; he is born in Chapter 25, the next ten chapters are mainly about him, and he finally dies at the end of Chapter 49. Today's passage represents a turning point in that story.

Even before his birth, God had told his mother Rebekah that the younger of her twins (Jacob) would serve the older (Esau). The babies jostled with each other in the womb and Jacob emerged grasping Esau's heel. The following chapters describe Jacob's struggles to achieve this promise by his own efforts. Jacob tricked his brother into surrendering his birthright for a bowl of stew, and later tricks his elderly father into giving him his blessing in place of Esau.

Jacob has to flee because of Esau's anger, then himself gets tricked by Laban, before tricking him back in order to build up his wealth. He finally flees back to his homeland with the herds of animals<sup>2</sup> he has built up, but is confronted by the news that his brother is coming to meet him with an army of men. Jacob is described as being in 'great fear and distress' and, as Linda Stannard reminded us last week, it is sometimes in the darkest of times that God comes alongside up.

God certainly comes alongside Jacob in spectacular style, literally wrestling with him through the night. When God finally shows His superiority by putting Jacob's hip out of joint, Jacob still hangs on tight, saying 'I will not let you go, unless you bless me'.

John White in his book '[People in Prayer](#)' suggests that these are the words that God has been longing to hear from Jacob for years. God wanted to bless Jacob all that time, but Jacob was instead striving to get things by his own strength and through trickery. Finally Jacob realises his weakness and casts himself on God's mercy.

*Heavenly father, we know that you are a loving God who wants to bless us. Teach us when we need to strive for your kingdom and when we need to surrender to you, recognising our own weakness and relying on your strength. Amen.*