

Does It ALWAYS Have to Be a Wrestling Match?
[Genesis 32:22-30](#); [Mark 14:32-36](#)

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September 24, 2023; 18th Sunday of Ordinary Time

Our Scripture Lessons this morning seem to be an odd pairing. Why put these two together? What do they have in common?

In a way, they are both about wrestling. Jacob literally wrestling with God at the Jabbok. Jesus metaphorically wrestling with God, and maybe himself, in the Garden of Gethsemane.

Personally, I've never done any wrestling. Other than the usual playground scuffles I've never done any wrestling. But I can see how wrestling can be good for you. I can see how it can be a real benefit to a person.

For one thing, wrestling helps us know ourselves. How strong are we? How much drive do we have? How much intensity? How much commitment?

Wrestling also helps us get to know the other person. By the time you've spent a few minutes holding each other as tight as you can, your faces shoved up in each other's armpit, you know each other pretty well. Maybe better than you want.

Maybe that's why wrestling is a common figure of speech. We talk about wrestling with a problem at home or work. We wrestle with temptation or addiction. We wrestle with ourselves about asking someone on a date, or how we're going to reprimand someone at work, or perhaps how we are going to start a difficult conversation with our family.

All these issues are difficult, aren't they? Wrestling, by its very nature, is not easy. Wrestling takes effort and it involves getting to know the other person, or the issue, very well. Wrestling requires getting up close and personal. You can't do it from a distance.

Wrestling can be a good analogy for our relationship with God. We wrestle with living a godly lifestyle. We wrestle with God's will or purpose for our life. We wrestle over whether or not we really believe in the resurrection, or the virgin birth, or if God even loves us. Knowing God well, knowing God's will and purpose for our

lives, requires getting up close and personal with God. And sometimes that's a struggle. Sometimes, it's a real wrestling match.

Struggling, wrestling, can be a good thing. When we do it well, we learn a lot about ourselves and what we're made of. We learn about our emotional strength, our insight, our sense of purpose and commitment.

But do we really want to wrestle with God? Does every encounter with God have to be a wrestling match? Does our relationship with God have to be a constant struggle? Is God our constant opponent, staring at us from across the ring?

Last Wednesday night, I joined in the confirmation class. They were discussing God. What is God like? Here are a few of the verses they looked at.

I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore I have continued my faithfulness to you. (Jeremiah 31:3)

⁹Is there anyone among you who, if your child asks for bread, will give a stone? ¹⁰Or if the child asks for a fish, will give a snake? ¹¹If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good things to those who ask him! (Matthew 7:9-11)

³Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, ⁴just as he chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him in love. ⁵He destined us for adoption as his children through Jesus Christ, according to the good pleasure of his will, ⁶to the praise of his glorious grace that he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved. (Ephesians 1:3-6)*

Do any of those sound like someone who wants to wrestle us? Do they make God sound like our opponent?

If you were here last Wednesday morning for the funeral, or if you have been to a funeral over which I have presided, you know I like to spend the first several minutes reading Scripture passages. Here are a few of the passages I like to read.

God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore, we will not fear. (Psalm 46:1)

The eternal God is your dwelling place, and underneath are the everlasting arms. (Deuteronomy 33:27)

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. (John 3:16)

Come to me, all who labor and are heavily burdened, and I will give you rest. (Matthew 11:28)

Peace, I leave with you. My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, and neither let them be afraid. (John 14:27)

Again, do any of these sound like someone who wants to wrestle us? Do they make God sound like our opponent?

Sometimes, wrestling is good for us. Sometimes, the only way to resolve an issue is getting in there and grappling with it. Work, home: our own anxieties, compulsions, fears. The longer we have our face jammed in its armpit, the more determined we are to solve the problem.

Sometimes, we wrestle with God. We want to know God's will for our life. We can't determine which direction our church should be going. We don't want to love, or even forgive, our sister or brother.

Wrestling has a price. Jacob had his hip put out of joint. The cup Jesus prayed about did not pass from him.

Wrestling with God has a price, but it's also a blessing. Jacob was blessed with a new name. Jesus died but was raised from the dead. There are times when wrestling with God is the absolute right thing to do.

But every moment with God doesn't have to be a wrestling match. Our relationship with God doesn't have to be one long, sweaty match with our faces jammed into God's armpit. As we saw in our other lessons, God wants our relationship to primarily be a

relationship of love. God wants our relationship to be about love because God is love.

Thanks be to God! Amen.