

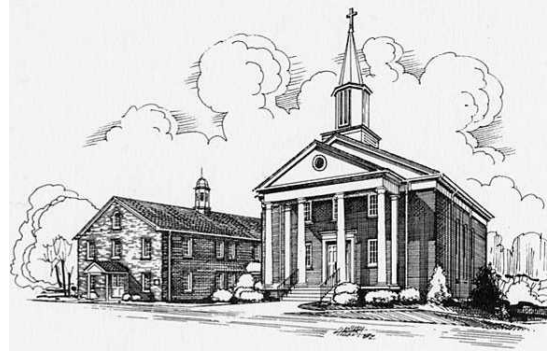
**The Lessons Appointed for Use**

**on**

**Proper 13**

**Year A**

**RCL**



Genesis 32:22-31  
Matthew 14:13-21

The Collect

Let your continual mercy, O Lord, cleanse and defend your Church; and, because it cannot continue in safety without your help, protect and govern it always by your goodness; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and

ever. *Amen.*

*Genesis 32:22-31*

The same night Jacob 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.

**Matthew 14:13-21**

Jesus withdrew in a boat to a deserted place by himself. But when the crowds heard it, they followed him on foot from the towns. When he went ashore, he saw a great crowd; and he had compassion for them and cured their sick. When it was evening, the disciples came to him and said, “This is a deserted place, and the hour is now late; send the crowds away so that they may go into the villages and buy food for themselves.” Jesus said to them, “They need not go away; you give them something to eat.” They replied, “We have nothing here but five loaves and two fish.” And he said, “Bring them here to me.” Then he ordered the

crowds to sit down on the grass. Taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven, and blessed and broke the loaves, and gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowds. And all ate and were filled; and they took up what was left over of the broken pieces, twelve baskets full. And those who ate were about five thousand men, besides women and children.

## SERMON

We all know that we need to wear masks, not just for our own protection, but for the protection of those around us. Perversely, we see protests everywhere from people who don't want to be told to wear a mask. One woman's sign really stuck with me. It read, "Muzzles are for animals. I'm a free woman." Tom Nichols, author of "The Death of Expertise" responded:

**"For these people, our national motto is not 'In God We Trust' or 'E Pluribus Unum', but rather: 'You're not the boss of me.'"<sup>1</sup>**

Loss of personal autonomy heads up every list we might construct of things people fear. We rebel at any suggestion that we are subject to any com-

<sup>1</sup> Tom Nichols in USA Today

pulsion beyond our own will. I spoke last week of walking humbly with your God. Taking on the name Christian means consciously acknowledging your relationship with the very creator of the universe, and you better believe that needs be done humbly! And yet...we are calamitously stubborn creatures.

With that said, let's look at the tension involved in the relationship of created to Creator. On the one hand, whether one believes in God or not, one is still a creature of the Creator. Yes, you'd get argument over that, but those who would argue aren't here. We'll save that for another time. The point is that your status as a creature of God isn't changed by your "beliefs" about the matter. You are, and He



is the boss of you.

On the other hand, there is our stubborn fear of loss of personal autonomy. Jesus says:

‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’

However much we echo this commandment with our mouths, somewhere, deep down beneath our consciousness, our childish, wounded Id<sup>2</sup> cries out, “You’re not the boss of me!”

And that is where the trouble always starts.

Our story today is about Jacob. Jacob had had quite a life when we meet him in today’s account. He was second-born of twins, born grasping his brother, Esau’s, heel. He bought Esau’s birthright for a bowl of beans, tricked his father, Isaac, into

<sup>2</sup> The one of the three divisions of the psyche in psychoanalytic theory that is completely unconscious and is the source of psychic energy derived from instinctual needs and drives. Miriam Webster

granting him the blessing intended for Esau, then was tricked by Laban into working for seven years for the woman he desired, only to have a substitution made. Then, he worked another seven years, obtained Rachel, but then had to work an additional six years for Laban. During that time, he became wealthy. As you can imagine, Laban's family thought little of that, and became hostile. It was time to leave, and leave he did, following God's direction.

Then the Lord said to Jacob, "Return to the land of your ancestors and to your kindred, and I will be with you."

He's not out of the woods yet. Remember, there's still Esau.

Jacob sent messengers before him to his brother Esau in the land of Seir, the country of Edom, instructing them, “Thus you shall say to my lord Esau: Thus says your servant Jacob, ‘I have lived with Laban as an alien, and stayed until now; and I have oxen, donkeys, flocks, male and female slaves; and I have sent to tell my lord, in order that I may find favor in your sight.’”

Esau is not impressed. He’s still mad.

The messengers returned to Jacob, saying, “We came to your brother Esau, and he is coming to meet you, and four hundred men are with him.”

Jacob did what he could to protect what was his.

He divided his company into two portions, sent his family, his slaves and all his possessions across the Jabok, sat down and prayed his dilemma.

And Jacob said, “O God of my father Abraham and God of my father Isaac, O LORD who said to me, ‘Return to your country and to your kindred, and I will do you good,’ I am not worthy of the least of all the steadfast love and all the faithfulness that you have shown to your servant, for with only my staff I crossed this Jordan; and now I have become two companies. Deliver me, please, from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau, for I am afraid of him; he may come and kill us all, the mothers with the children. Yet you have said, ‘I will surely do you good, and make your offspring as the sand of the sea, which cannot be counted because of their number.’”

Listen to his words! “God, you told me to go back to my home country and promised to do me good, but Esau is before me and Laban behind me. I’m between a rock and a hard spot! But you insist you will do me good? You promise me many off-

spring?”

This is the place where most commentators begin to chase after the man with whom Jacob will wrestle, and there are thousands of years of discussion about that which you can go read it if you want. I don't want, because I want to focus on our own, personal experience.

Jacob stripped himself down to his bare existence. He sent away maids and wives and servants, even his many possessions and flocks to be alone with the silence following his words. That is where we meet God. Not in noise and turmoil, but in silence. That is the experience of all of us. That is where Jacob brought himself to wrestle with the contradiction he faced. His humanity told him one

thing about his situation. The word of God told him another. THAT is what Jacob wrestled with. The text presents it to us as a wrestling match. That's as good a metaphor as any I can think of.

Dr. Fauci and the weight of medical authority tell us that the scrupulous use of masks and social distancing protects our neighbors from the spread of this awful virus and Jesus puts the welfare of our neighbors in our hands. This shouldn't be hard to understand, but all too many people scream, "You're not the boss of me" and go to parties in packed bars. Those who do so are not evil people, bent on spreading disease. They are people who have not yet gone into the silence to wrestle with God. They are selfish people who nonetheless

sense that to wrestle with God will wound their selfishness, and their commitment to their selfishness is the very definition of who they are. To give it up and leave them a creature who knows his relationship with his Creator means giving up on the almighty self. That makes all the difference. Facing that God IS the boss of you takes courage, and not everyone is up to it. Be courageous, church!

**AMEN**

## **BENEDICTION**

Perhaps the wisest commentator on contemporary American thought is Charlie Brown, and he says, “Good grief! Wear your mask!”

The Lord bless you and keep you;  
the Lord make his face to shine upon you, and be  
gracious to you;  
the Lord lift up his countenance upon you, and  
give you peace.

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Optional parts of the readings are set off in square brackets.

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