

Pay Day Someday Genesis 32:22-32

Maple Grove 9/42022

When I was a preschooler, growing up on our first farm, we possessed one link to the outside world. That was our Silvertone Montgomery Ward radio. It was powered by a car battery and it was used sparingly, but every weekday afternoon mother listened to a “soap” and Cowboy Loy, who broadcast over WWVA, Wheeling WV. I still remember his theme song:

Banners are flying todays the big show,
cowboys are whooping the big rodeo,
the announcers are busy, the horns give a toot,
cowboys rush doggies to the end of the shoot.

Well, recently as I was looking at a report of the January 6, 2021, eruption in Washington D. C. I concluded that what happened there was not a rodeo, although there were “banners flying.” Lots of them. “Jesus ” flags, “Don’t tread on me,” “Skull & Crossbones,” The thirteen star “Betsey Ross,” flag. And, of course the “Confederate” flag so defiantly carried through the building. Also, the QANON man, was there, horns and hairy chest. And Richard “Bing” Barnett, reclining in the Speaker’s chair, with his rugged he-man boots on the desk. It looked like a terror attack, yet from some angles it looked like kids playing war, or, it could have been some kind of comedy show. It was, however, in all reality, a brazen, premeditated attack on the government of these United States. And it was a wake-up call to most of us who love this country, telling us that something

is terribly wrong right here in “River City,” and we need to look, evaluate and act to restore the Republic.

Now most of the actors felt really good about what they had done. They took selfies, and sent them flying through the clouds to family and friends, captioned with “I was in the Peoples’ House.” Yet, in a few weeks “The music stopped.” The music stopped, with a knock on the door and when the door opened a badge was flashed: “FBI, we want to talk with you.”

As I pondered this drama, I began to recall a sermon I heard on a long play record more than sixty years ago; a sermon about Ahab and Jezebel killing Naboth and taking his vineyard. And in time, you remember that Jezebel came to a horrible, horrible, death. That old preacher believed the unspeakably hellish death, was because she and Ahab treated Naboth with unrestrained hatred. And that is the point of the sermon. Again, and again the old guy returned to the refrain of his message: “There’s a payday someday.” “Payday Someday.” The chickens always come home to roost.” The January sixers are facing their payday now. And for some it won’t end soon. And for some, well, they await the knock.

II. Now I have said all that to get your attention. To get the blood moving through your mental computer. So, now I can say, Jacob knew all about paydays, and he knew he had one coming. I am sure that some nights Esau appeared in Jacob’s dreams with a spiked cudgel in his hand about to bash Jacob’s skull, and Jacob

might suddenly yell, awakening his wives with screams and punches in the air, and then find himself awake and in a profuse sweat. You know the story. Jacob and Esau were twins. Esau was in the process of being born and Jacob reached out and tried to supplant him. Tried to grab his heel. But he failed. Gradually the boys grew up. Esau became the hunter. Jacob evolved into more of a home boy. And he also liked staying around mom and being special in her sight. And she enjoyed Jacob. I think more than she liked Esau. Always a bad deal in a family.

There came a day when in a moment of silliness Esau came in, apparently empty handed, from hunting. He was hungry and Jacob had a pot of deer meet, lintels, potatoes and carrots simmering on the fire. And Esau said, "I'll give you my birthright, my inheritance, for a bowl of that stew." It was done. Esau thought it was a joke, but Jacob did not. And sometime later, Rebecca, the boys' conniving mother, designed a way to get old blind Isaac to give Jacob the ultimate family blessing. It happened, and Esau was voted out as first son and Jacob was given the crown. Even after Isaac knew he had been bamboozled he refused to correct it. He was like my first cousin who married an alcoholic who some nights would get his revolver, come into the bedroom and threaten to kill her. "Why didn't you divorce him"? I asked. "Oh, I promised 'for better or worse' before God." Isaac had given his blessing, and that was that. It was done.

When Esau learned of their conniving plot, he prepared to kill Jacob. Just human, you know. Rebekah could see it in Esau's eyes. So, momma formulated a plan. She sent Jacob off to live with her brother, his uncle Laban. Now time has passed, years have flown, and Jacob has done well, in fact so well that Laban wanted him to leave; to move on. For Jacob was accused of enriching himself at the expense of the Laban Clan. He, apparently had engaged in some unethical practices against his uncle. And, of course, Laban had done the same with him. They shared the same DNA, corrupted DNA. Maybe some of us have a bit of that DNA too.

Remember, Jacob worked seven years for Rachael and the morning after the wedding he woke up with Leah on his arm. (I have often wondered about that part of this story. I can't believe Jacob was that naive). But, finally he had both daughters for wives. Years passed and things changed, Jacob's possessions grew exponentially, and Laban's clan turned against him, so he and his entourage left quietly in the night, like a renter who is six months in arrears. And they were on the road for some time before Laban knew. He chased after his son-in-law and daughters. Caught them. They talked. I think loudly part of the time. Real loud. Laban complained that Jacob had stolen the household gods. Jacob knew nothing of that. But, Rachael did and was sitting on them as her father searched the tent. She had stolen the gods. That's like seminarians stealing stoles. Finally, when they

had finished their negotiations and came to some kind of agreement, they set up a pile of stones and agreed that, “So long as neither moves past these stones we will live in peace.” Translated: Laban said, “So long as I don’t see your face, we are good.”

They sealed the deal with an oath: ***The Lord watch between you and me, when we are absent one from another.*** That is familiar to some because it was a youth benediction for years. What we didn’t know was the rest of it. ***If you ill treat my daughters, though no one else is with us, remember that God is witness between us.*** The implication: And God will take care of you.

Now Jacob and his entourage are approaching Esau country. Jacob is scared, as one of my parishioners used to say, “scared spitless.” He did not know what lay ahead. It is said that fear can focus our senses. I have a feeling Jacob was fully focused. But being Jacob, he had a plan. First he sent all his hired help on across the Jabbok, with all his goats, sheep, cows, camels and probably dogs. A little later he sent his wife and family on across. Some think he was willing to sacrifice some of them, even his family, so he might be able to get away, just in case Esau was still angry.

With everyone across the river, he then entered into the struggle; the struggle between the ***“Conniving Jacob and the Honorable Jacob.*** I know, the Bible implies he wrestled with God. But what does that mean? What does it mean beyond struggling with the light and dark sides of himself?—And he, after an all-night struggle finds peace. Conversion is not easy. “Come forward & accept

Jesus,” some say. “Get real and deal with who you are and who you want to be,” is more like it and more challenging. It takes a life-time. But Jacob’s two sides, **“Who he was and who he wanted to be”**, struggled, until Jacob embraced a new person who he expected to become. A new life for himself. He was determined now to set things right between himself and his twin brother. And as he headed across his Jabbok, he was left with a limp. Yes, according to the story, he didn’t walk the same. Now don’t let the limp bother you. He was changed and it showed outwardly. That’s the way real conversion works. God even changed his name from **“Jacob”** which means **“Supplanter,”** or **“Ouster,”** to **“Israel,”** which means **“The one who strives with God.”** **Jacob was a changed man.** The Bible says, “He wrestled with a man; but the writer also says “God.” Jacob says, “For I have seen God face to face.” Some artists have angels standing nearby over the battle Jacob engages. They are always indicators of God’s presence. And they point toward change.

Bishop Gerald Ensley had an auto accident in December of 1962. On Christmas day the family was called in to Riverside, for the doctors thought he was dying. But he didn’t. He began to heal. And the following June, and I was there, at Lakeside, when he addressed the three thousand gathered in Hoover Auditorium. He said, “One does not hear the whisper of angel wings and remain the same person.” Jacob limped. Maybe it was because he was now relaxed. Maybe it because spiritual battles mark us.—You know the rest of the story, Esau had already forgiven him, they embraced and lived happily ever after. Except for the

next generations.

Conclusion: We have all wrestled with God at some point in life. Maybe not today, we have settled the conflict with the Almighty. But someone here may still be struggling. Like the woman who had carried a burden for 60 years. She had gone to be with her soldier boyfriend. They consummated their relationship, but never married. Now her husband was dead. She had to tell the children. All over 60. She did, and they smiled; said, He was a good dad and husband. We don't see the point. She must have limped after that. She had been on the banks of the Jabbok for scores of years.

But there is more. Collectively we are on the banks of the Jabbok. We United Methodists will soon become United Methodist and Fragmented Methodists. Our struggle with God, ourselves, our understanding of what God wants have not brought unity, but divorce. That sometimes happens. We are all ready limping, we just don't quite know what it means.

But now we are in a Jacob-like struggle at one more level. The Democratic America is in major conflict with another faction that is seeking an Authoritarian America. Democracy is so messy, but a strongman can make decisions quickly. And the struggle is on. Some are eager to establish a Christian America. And for some that really sounds fantastic. But history does not give a positive report where Christian or any other religion rules, or has ruled. At this hour the struggle within this nation is on. And each of us is being called to embrace the God who revealed himself in Jesus; the Jesus whose loves all people, the white folks, the

black, brown, yellow, red, as well as Christian, Jew, Muslim, Sike, Hindu, and those who stand alone. The Inclusive Christ. That is our calling: to embrace who changes our and lives for the better. Then our pay day will be joyful, not tearful.

Jacob wrestled with God, with the two sides of himself. Now we are wrestling on the banks of the Jabbok. Some, individually, Some as United Methodists, Some who love this country and know if Democracy rules, it will require them to stay up all night and wrestle with God, or the two minds struggling within.—What ever the decisions in life, there is always a payday. Sometimes we receive Gold, other times it's a cudgel. Either way we will walk differently. Amen.