

August 2, 2026 - Meditation

In each of the readings today the main figures are in a position of weakness - everyone except Jesus. Jacob has been wounded by the man who wrestled with him through the night. In this morning's Psalm, David is pleading his case before God and awaiting God's vindication. Paul writes, "I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart." The disciples are facing a crowd of thousands who need to be fed, and they have only a few loaves and fishes among them.

Can we relate to any of these biblical characters? When have we been wounded, disabled, made to feel weak or incapable? When have we waited for God to answer a prayer or defend a cause we believed to be good and just - waited for God to give heed to our cry? When have we been in anguish over a broken relationship or felt powerless in the face of the need around us? If we have, we can take

comfort. We are in good company. We are part of a great crowd of people who have gone before us.

In Genesis we meet Jacob at night, all alone. He has sent his whole family on ahead of him. "Jacob was left alone and a man wrestled with him until daybreak." A man wrestled with HIM - this was not Jacob's idea. He did not go looking for a wrestling match with an angel of the Lord. In the process, the angel struck him on the hip and put it out of joint. Up to that moment he was holding his own; then he found himself in a position where it would have been impossible to prevail.

In his letter to the Romans we find Paul grieving over his own people's refusal to acknowledge Jesus as their Messiah. He's not just a little broken up about it. He says "I have great sorrow." The Greek word for great is "mega." I have *mega* sorrow. "And unceasing, [unremitting] anguish in my heart." He continues, "For I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my

own people." He says, they have been given everything they need to lead them to Christ: the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, the promises. But the answer, for the most part, has come back NO.

In the book of Matthew the disciples - quite understandably - tell Jesus to send the crowds away so they could buy food for themselves. But Jesus replies, "They need not go away; you give them something to eat." That would have earned a double take from me. "We have nothing here but five loaves and two fish." Jesus, you are asking the impossible. There are 5000 of them - and that's just counting the men; the number doesn't even include the women and children. Indeed, the need clearly far outweighs the disciples' ability to meet it. How could they have any meaningful impact? They're so few of them and so little food.

Do we ever wonder about our own ability to have an impact? Do we say, "Send the crowds away," and quietly retire from the scene? Do we focus so much on our own

limitations, weaknesses, anguish that we end up paralyzed? Are we discouraged that God has not given heed to our cry? We share quite a bit in common with our human counterparts in the Scriptures.

But let's read on in Genesis. What did Jacob do despite his disability? "Then the man said, "Let me go, for the day is breaking." But Jacob said, "I will not let you go, unless you bless me." Jacob refused to let go. He refused to accept defeat. And the angel changed his name to Israel, the one who strives with God and prevails. There the angel blessed him. He did not heal him, though. When day finally came, Jacob still had a limp.

Paul, despite the rejection he faced from the people of his own spiritual upbringing, did not forsake taking the gospel to them. Everywhere he traveled in the Roman Empire, before he went anywhere else, he took the message of Christ to the local synagogue. He knew he was going to

continue to face rejection, but he did not close the door on the relationship.

The disciples, faced with an impossible situation, nevertheless took those few loaves and fishes and went into the crowd. And Jesus performed a miracle for them.

As long as we have life and breath, God is not finished with us - and we cannot be finished with God. It is not time to blow retreat or walk away. We need courage to wrestle with the angel as Jacob did, persevering until we receive a blessing from God. We need courage to face the possibility of rejection while serving as ministers of reconciliation. We need courage to take the few loaves and fishes we have and believe that God can multiply our meager efforts.

David was still waiting for God's answer when he said,

“But at my vindication I shall see your face;
when I awake, I shall be satisfied, beholding
your likeness.”