

The story of Jacob wrestling has left people wrestling with it for many years.

Rebekah gave birth to twins; first Esau - red and covered in hair; and then came Jacob holding onto Esau's heel in his quest to have been born first. And so he was named Jacob because the name means heel. And in modern wrestling terms, the 'heel' is the bad guy.

Wrestling is considered one of the world's oldest sports. Depictions of it have been found in caves dating back 15,000 years. We know that it was in the original Greek Olympic Games in 776 BC. There are several forms: freestyle, Greco-Roman, and folklore.

In the story from Genesis, the man Jacob wrestles with, could have been Esau, his brother whom he was running from. But later it is described as some sort of mysterious divine man. Let's call this divine being "God". And God gives Jacob a permanent limp. Jacob realizes that he has striven with God and survived. Peniel. Seen God's face and survived.

This text is paired with Jesus' story about a widow. It's framed by an editorial note to pray unceasingly, yet it takes a twist into the theme of justice. Finally, Jesus asks, 'Will (He) find faith on earth?'

How many of us have ever felt like we too have had a Peniel moment? A time of wrestling with God around a prayer issue, a justice issue or both?

We've wrestled with God in prayer over something going on with one of our children. A new diagnosis. A character trait we are trying to release and change. Our knees are getting scraped up due to being on them so much. Or our spirits cannot understand God's seeming delay in acting or the incredible suffering of other humans at the hands of an unjust few. We wrestle with how to advocate or the fear of what to do leaves us paralyzed.

In Luke's Gospel, justice can be defined as fear of God and respect for others.

Luke's community was dismayed at Jesus' delay in returning. Remember that after the resurrection, it was believed that Jesus would return in their lifetimes. We can imagine how frustrating it was when he didn't come; particularly when they were experiencing persecution.

So this story speaks to that delay, and the Justice they sought. This judge is an interesting man, fearing neither God nor respecting humans. Luke's designation of injustice. There is a widow at his door. In the Torah, three categories of people you must take care of were widows, orphans and aliens in your land. The fact this widow is at a judge's house shows her complete desperation in need.

God is not like the unjust judge. Earlier in Luke Jesus says, "If you who are evil know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Heavenly Father give you!"

Yet for those who feel like God is delaying helping them, perhaps we can relate to this judge who holds out until the last before he assists the widow. God where are you in my moment of need? God where are you in our moment of need?

We can imagine that both Israelis and Palestinians have asked that question in the last several years. Likewise, Ukrainians and Russians and mothers of American youth entrenched in gangs, loving fathers going through custody battles, or people looking for meaningful work. God where are you? Why don't you act... Now?!

The Hebrew Bible often speaks of the fear of the Lord. Yes, fear can be translated "awe." I was reminded recently that an experience of God can be pretty frightening. Almost all Biblical descriptions of humans meeting the divine, even an angel, include the emotion of fear.

Hats off to Jacob who hung on and held his own all the way through the night. Wrestling with God can be downright scary. Yet is that not a truly honest picture of what faith and trust look like? Someone once said, "If trusting God is easy, you need a bigger God."

Thank goodness, the Bible has multiple stories and multiple nuances in each story to feed our faith. Jesus prefaces this story by urging our

persistence in prayer. He gave us the Lord's Prayer - the most complete prayer we ever need. Jesus showed us what compassion and justice and prayer looked like each day of His early life!

How big is your God? Mine?

Is there any fear of God left? Or shall we abandon Jesus' commands to share the Gospel lest we offend someone? Will we stop advocating for people who don't have food, shelter and clothing because we wonder what others will think?

What will God think when the world stops praying? Or loving? Or caring for widows, orphans and resident aliens?

I believe God will not stop loving us. That is God's nature. Even God's love leads to God's justice. Yet I'm not certain I want to find out otherwise.

A pastor once said he believed, the world had not ended yet, because people were still praying. If we have nothing left to say to God, let that be our next prayer! Amen.