A VERY UNLIKELY HERO OF THE BIBLE – JACOB

Jack Hott, August 5-6, 2017

Introduction

Time working in Paducah KY and attending Concord UMC

Comcast cable not available in my new apartment

Began reading Genesis (too many “begets”), Judges, Samuel, and Kings and then the prophets.

Old Testament writers didn’t pull any punches! Rated R for graphic violence and strong sexual content.

Because of my withdrawal from cable TV, I knew some of the names of unlikely heroes Rev. Haines has been focusing on (but not all of them).

Using the lectionary; old testament, new testament, gospel, and psalms.

Sunday August 6, 2017, 9th Sunday after Pentecost

Psalm 17 is basis for our Opening Response

First Reading: Genesis 32 where Jacob wrestles with God

Gospel Reading: Matt 14:13-21 with the miracle of the fish and loaves

New Testament: Romans 9:1-5 which wasn’t read but I’ll come back to it.

Let’s talk about a most unlikely hero, Jacob

Prayer; God, may the words from my mouth and thoughts in my mind, and the words and thoughts of all who are here, be pleasing in Your sight or make so through our lord Jesus. Amen

1. Story of Jacob before wrestling with God (Gen 32)
   1. Steals Isaac’s blessing
   2. Jacob flees to Laban
   3. Dream at Bethel (Gen 28:10) Jacob’s ladder. God offers Jacob essentially the same thing he offered his grandfather Abraham
   4. Marriages to Leah and Rachel (tricked by Laban)
   5. Escape from Laban & Rachel steals the family idols (lies about being pregnant to hide the idols)
2. Jacob prepares gifts to appease his brother and, dividing his family and belongings into two camps, spends the night alone on the river Jabbok. Jacob meets God, who, disguised as a man, physically wrestles with Jacob until dawn. Jacob demands a blessing from his opponent, and the man blesses Jacob by renaming him “Israel,” meaning, “he struggles with God.” The next morning, Jacob meets Esau, who welcomes his brother with open arms.
3. The story of Jacob doesn’t end here. Violence and treachery continued among Jacob’s sons, but the [Torah](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Torah) traces the Israelites to the patriarch [Jacob](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jacob), grandson of Abraham, who was renamed Israel after a mysterious incident in which he wrestles all night with God or an angel. Jacob's twelve sons (in order of birth) Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Dan, Naphtali, Gad, Asher, Issachar, Zebulun, Benjamin, and Joseph (who was sold into slavery in Egypt by his brothers, but became powerful under Pharaoh leading to the Hebrew presence in Egypt then Moses and the Exodus several generations later)
4. Throughout Jacob’s journey there is a theme that reoccurs throughout the Bible; God’s salvation for us is offered over and over again.
5. Fast forward to Matthew to the miracle where Jesus with five loaves and two fish feeds “5,000 men, besides women and children” AND has 12 basketsful of broken pieces left over!
6. Growing up I heard many sermons focused on explaining the miracle ranging from supernatural to the Holy Spirit moving among the crowd and people sharing what they had rather than keeping it to themselves. And through the sharing brought on by the Holy Spirit there was a surplus of food!
7. Reading it this time in the context of our bible lessons for today and the story of Jacob, I saw something here I hadn’t noticed before. Who were the 5,000 men plus the women and children? They were part of a miraculous event that is still talked about 2,000 years later! We really don’t know much about them.
8. Some saw the miracle and heard the good news and joined in! Some saw the miracle and heard the good news but slipped away not unlike Jacob. Others were there for the free meal and missed the whole thing! Even today we are not so different.
9. The last point I want to share with you comes from Paul’s letter to the believers in Rome. As we all know, Paul was instrumental in bringing Christianity to non-Jews. Read from Romans 9:1-8.
10. Children of the promise – that includes us! Today we bring together God’s promise to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. God’s promise through Jesus at the miracle of the loaves and fish. And, now, Paul linking by faith our inheritance! Unlikely heroes of the bible and unknown unlikely heroes of the faith then and now. Just like Jacob, God’s invitation still stands. It’s up to each of us to reach out and take hold of it. BUT, like Jacob, we will stand at the river. We wrestle with God and ourselves before we can crossover. Not easy but it’s a call that stands before each of us.