August 2, 2020

Ninth Sunday after Pentecost

**Call to Worship:** Come and celebrate the good news of God’s love. Come and God will give you healing and fill your souls with joy. Come, and join in the celebration of God’s great love for you.

**Opening Prayer:** In the darkness of night and the brightness of day, you, O Lord, are present to us. As we wrestle with situations which seem to drain us of our energy; as we struggle to find out who you call us to be, you reach out to us with reassurance of empowerment and courage for the days ahead. Calm our spirits and prepare our hearts and lives to receive your awesome grace. It is in Jesus’ name that we pray. Amen.

**Scripture: 2 Corinthians 12:3-10** And I know that this man—whether in the body or apart from the body I do not know, but God knows—was caught up to paradise and heard inexpressible things, things that no one is permitted to tell. I will boast about a man like that, but I will not boast about myself, except about my weaknesses. Even if I should choose to boast, I would not be a fool, because I would be speaking the truth. But I refrain, so no one will think more of me than is warranted by what I do or say, or because of these surpassingly great revelations. Therefore, in order to keep me from becoming conceited, I was given a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me. Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ’s sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

**Prayer of Confession:** Lord of mercy and hope, we come before you acknowledging that we have fallen short of being the kind of disciples that you have called us to be. We have turned our backs on people in need; we have closed our ears to the cries of the voiceless, and, we have failed to follow your holy will for our lives. We hesitate to come before you because we believe that we have disappointed you. When we falter and slide off the path of hope you place before us, pick us up, dust us off and put us back on the trail that leads to life eternal. Forgive us our short-comings and weaknesses. We humbly ask it in Christ’s name. Amen.

**Words of Assurance:** Rejoice! God’s love is poured over you this day. Feel the power of God’s mercy in your life. Be at peace and know that through Christ’s atoning blood you are forgiven. Amen.

**Message for the Young and Young at Heart – “The Lord is in This Place”**

Throughout the years I have sung many beautiful and meaningful spirituals. One of these is called, “We Are Climbing Jacob’s Ladder.”

Lyrics go like this: 1. We are climbing Jacob's ladder

 We are climbing Jacob's ladder

 We are climbing Jacob's ladder

 Soldiers of the Cross

 2. Ev'ry round goes higher higher (repeat 2x)

 Soldiers of the Cross

 3. Sinner, do you love my Jesus (or “Children, do you love my Jesus) (repeat 2x)

 Soldiers of the Cross

 4. If you love Him why not serve Him (repeat 2x)

 Soldiers of the Cross

This song is based on the story of Jacob. Jacob was fleeing his brother Esau’s anger. He stopped for the night and used a stone for a pillow. During the night he had a dream in which he saw a ladder with Angels ascending and descending on it. God spoke to Jacob in the dream and among other things he promised to always be with Jacob and to watch over him wherever he went.

It is important that we always remember that God is always with us and that no matter what may happen, God will be there to help us. So let me ask you, “Children, do you know my Jesus.” If so, do you love him and will you serve him as he keeps you safe each day.

### Morning Prayer: Gracious Lord, we are filled with a mixture of feelings today. Some of us are rejoicing in the

###  wonderful time of rest and relaxation; while others continue to seek relief from the burdens and worries that

###  they bear. All of us stand in need of your refreshing and nourishing love.

### Many around us have needs. Some are hungry, some are hurting, some are grieving, some are lonely. The needs we see are so many they boggle our mind and overwhelm us, so much so that we sometimes turn our backs and walk away. Give us strength and courage to be your loving disciples in the ways in which we care for others.

### Guide those who lead us and grant them the wisdom of your Spirit. Heal those who are sick, and comfort those who are hurting. Walk with the lonely and comfort those who grieve. Help us serve others and grant us your peace.

### We ask this and all that is upon our hearts in the name of Christ our Lord and Savior. Amen.

### Special Music

**Scripture: Genesis 32:22-32 Jacob Wrestles With God**

That night Jacob got up and took his two wives, his two female servants and his eleven sons and crossed the ford of the Jabbok. After he had sent them across the stream, he sent over all his possessions. So Jacob was left alone, and a man wrestled with him till daybreak. When the man saw that he could not overpower him, he touched the socket of Jacob’s hip so that his hip was wrenched as he wrestled with the man. Then the man said, “Let me go, for it is daybreak.”

 But Jacob replied, “I will not let you go unless you bless me.” The man asked him, “What is your name?”

 “Jacob,” he answered. Then the man said, “Your name will no longer be Jacob, but Israel, because you have struggled with God and with humans and have overcome.” Jacob said, “Please tell me your name.” But he replied, “Why do you ask my name?” Then he blessed him there.

 So Jacob called the place Peniel, saying, “It is because I saw God face to face, and yet my life was spared.”

### Morning Message: “Jacob the Wrestler”

### Can you name the President of the United States that was posthumously inducted into the Wrestling Hall of Fame? I’ll let you think about who it might be for a while.

### Today’s message is about a wrestler mentioned in the Bible, Jacob. Jacob participated in the most unusual wrestling match of all time. He wrestled with God.

### Being a wrestler was part of Jacob’s character. Even before he was born, he wrestled with his twin brother Esau in their mother's womb. The Lord told their mother that there were two nations at war in her womb.

### Esau was born first, but Jacob was right behind. He was so close that we are told in Scripture that he was holding onto Esau's heel. It’s almost as if Jacob was saying to Esau, “No you don’t! Get back here! I go first!”

### Jacob received his name from the strange struggle between Esau and him at birth. The name “Jacob” means, “One who takes by the heel.” It can also mean, “One who takes the place of.” Both are fitting for Jacob.

### “The Wrestler” would be a good name for Jacob. All through life he was constantly pulling at Esau's heel trying to take his place. You see Esau was the first born; if only by a few seconds. In the ancient world that position gave him certain rights and privileges which Jacob didn't have. One of these was called the “birth right.” This entitled him to a larger portion of his father's wealth and name.

### So Jacob decided to wrestle Esau's birthright away from him. He bought it for a bowl of stew. Later Jacob tricked him out of his father's blessing. Through trickery Jacob had finally wrestled Esau from his rightful place, Esau was so angry that Jacob had to flee for his life.

### It was during that escape that Jacob had his famous dream of a ladder to heaven of “We Are Climbing Jacob’s Ladder” fame. God spoke to Jacob during this dream and promised to make him a great nation.

### You might think that once Jacob got away from his brother that his wrestling career would end. But it had only just begun. You see, Jacob fell in love with a girl named Rachel and Rachel's Father Laban was a wrestler, too. Jacob offered to work for seven years to marry Rachel. But when the wedding night came Rachel's older sister Leah secretly took her place. In the morning Jacob found himself married to Leah. Laban 1. Jacob 0.

### Jacob then had to work another seven years for Rachel. But his father-in-law kept changing his wages so finally Jacob had to “wrestle” Laban for his pay.

### To make a long story short, Jacob and his family ended up fleeing from Laban. Laban caught up with Jacob and they came to an agreement. He has Rachael and Leah. He has his children, his livestock and his servants. The match goes to Jacob.

### Jacob wrestled with people throughout his life and won. He had wrestled with Esau and won. He had wrestled with his Father-in-law, Laban and won. He was now a rich man with a large family and many servants. But once again he found himself stuck between a rock and a hard place. On one side was his brother who might still want to kill him. On the other was his father-in-law who wasn’t exactly pleased with him.

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### But God had told Jacob to return to the land of his birth, to the land that God had promised him, to the land where his brother Esau lived. Needless to say Jacob was frightened at the idea of seeing Esau again. They hadn’t exactly parted on good terms. If you remember, Jacob had wrestled Esau's birthright and blessing away from him and Esau had expressed a desire for revenge.

### When the time came, Jacob heard news that made him even more frightened. Esau was coming to meet him with 400 men. Was this a welcoming party? Doubtful. Or, and I can imagine Jacob taking a deep breathe, was it Esau and his men setting out for revenge? Much more likely. What was Jacob to do?

### Jacob was human and as a human being he must have been afraid. So what should a human being who had a relationship with God do when they are afraid. Jacob knew. He was afraid of what was in store for him so he prayed.

### This is a pretty typical reaction for any human being. Many are they who want nothing to do with God, until they are afraid and feel they need help. “Where can I turn for help,” they ask and when all else escapes them, they turn to God saying, “I know. God will help me.” In Jacob’s case, he then turns to the promise that God had given him. God promised that he would become a great nation so he cries out, “I’m depending on you, Lord, I’m claiming that promise you made to me and I trust you to keep me safe through all that lies ahead of me.”

### Like Jacob, we can always turn to God in times of trial and uncertainty. We can claim the promises of his Word, the Bible and cry out, “Lord, help me! I’m not worthy of your help, but help me. I put my trust in you claiming the promises that you made in your Holy Word.”

### And the promises of God to care for us are myriad. One of the best places to find verses of comfort and reassurance of God’s care is in the Psalms.

### Psalm 27:1 says: “The LORD is my light and my salvation- whom shall I fear? The LORD is the stronghold of my life- of whom shall I be afraid?” If we continue on to the 14th verse, the same Psalm continues this thought by reminding us, “Wait for the Lord; be strong and take heart and wait for the Lord.”

### Psalm 118:6 tells us: “The LORD is with me; I will not be afraid. What can mere mortals do to me?”

### The prophet Isaiah in Isaiah 41:10 records these words to strengthen us: “So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.”

And, so as not to neglect the New Testament, one from **Romans 8:28**: “And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.”

### The list goes on and on. We, like Jacob can claim the promises recorded in Scripture, but we need to follow Jacob’s example in what comes next. Jacob took precautions.

### First he divided his company into two groups so that if one was attacked the other would survive. Then he sent some of his flocks ahead of him as a gift to his brother Esau. Lastly, Jacob sent his family.

### He exposed his vulnerability to his brother as a gesture of peace and held back his armed servants lest his brother feel that he was being attacked and defend himself.

### In preparation for the next day, Jacob sends his flocks and family ahead of him. Only Jacob was left. I imagine that a lot of memories came back as he sat around the campfire all alone. He probably thought of all the wrongs he had done to his brother and how his brother would be justified to take revenge. He probably thought about all that he had to lose, his wealth and servants, but more importantly, his family. Jacob thought in the silence of the night, a silence that must have seemed strange to him since he was used to the commotion of camp, the playfulness of his children, and, the sounds of his flocks and herds in the night.

### Jacob was alone; or was he? It was during this lonely night that Jacob the wrestler met his match. In the stillness of the night, a stranger appears and begins a wrestling match with Jacob. They wrestled long and hard throughout the night until the shadows of night began to pass and the dawn began to break forth in the east.

### Not wanting the match to continue, the stranger struck Jacob in the thigh dislocating his hip so that Jacob would be unable to continue and he, Jacob’s opponent, could get away.

### But Jacob wouldn’t give up. He continued to try to wrestle with his opponent. He had come to the realization that this was no ordinary man he was wrestling with. With that realization Jacob, true to his nature asked for a blessing. The stranger told him that his name would no longer be Jacob. From that time forward he would be known as Israel. No longer would he “One who grabs the heel.” Now, he would be called Israel, “"he who struggles with God.”

### But why did God or as some believe, an angel wrestle with Jacob? Didn't Jacob have enough problems to deal with? The last thing he needed was a divine wrestling match. After all, when he had been in a similar situation when fleeing the wrath of his brother, God gave him a message to comfort and reassure him. This message was quite different from the experience of having his hip dislocated.

### Ah! But God had a plan for Jacob! That plan hadn’t really changed, Jacob had. God had planned all along to make a great people out of his descendants. They would be a nation of people whom God would use to bless the world through a Messiah. Centuries later, the coming of Jesus whose coming would be a blessing to all humanity because of his offering of forgiveness, the peace of Shalom, and life eternal.

### Throughout his life God was preparing Jacob for his part in the wonderful plan. God had known that Jacob would strive with people. God had been the one to tell him to leave his homeland and now he was prepared to return to it.

### Why the wrestling match? I believe it was to illustrate for him what his life had been and to help him understand that instead of wrestling everyone and everything, now it was time to change not only his name, but his attitude and his way of life. He was now ready to face Esau and all that life could throw his way. The Wrestler was now a vessel able to be used by God and filled with his love.

### “So Jacob called the place Peniel, saying, ‘It is because I saw God face to face, and yet my life was spared.’ The sun rose above him as he passed Peniel, and he was limping because of his hip. . . . Jacob looked up and there was Esau, coming with his four hundred men” (Genesis 32:30-31, 33:1a).

### The time of reckoning was upon him. What would Esau do? What would he say after all these years? The Scriptures tell us, “Esau ran to meet Jacob and embraced him; he threw his arms around his neck and kissed him. And they wept” (Genesis 33:4).

### If only our country as deeply divided as it now is could follow this example. We have been wrestling with each other and with God for years now. God is telling us that it is time to stop wrestling and be the people that God wants us to be. God wants us to learn humility, empty our lives of our haughtiness and self-will that we might be servants. In some denominations, there is a special service held. It is call “Foot Washing” and finds its origin in the example Christ set in the Upper Room where he knelt at the feet of each disciple and washed their dusty dirty feet not only with water, but also with love.

### At the beginning of this message, I asked you a trivia question: Who is the President of the United States that was posthumously inducted into the Wrestling Hall of Fame? Do you know his name? It was Abraham Lincoln. Abraham Lincoln knew what it was not only to wrestle men in a match of strength, but he also knew what it was to wrestle with them in a competition of ideals. He knew what it was to be part of a divided nation. It was out of his experience of wrestling in both arenas that he wrote these words:

### A house divided against itself cannot stand. I believe this government cannot endure, permanently half slave and half free. I do not expect the Union to be dissolved — I do not expect the house to fall — but I do expect it will cease to be divided. It will become all one thing or all the other.

I know I have quoted **2 Chronicles 7:14** more than once this year, but I believe it is a verse that each and every person in these United States needs to take to heart. Our Lords message to us, as individuals and as a nation is, “if my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and I will forgive their sin and will heal their land.”

### God had a plan for Jacob and God has a plan for us, as individuals, as a church, and as a nation. May God grant us the humility to empty our lives that we might be vessels of God’s great and perfect will for our lives.

### <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kdmgpMfnjdU>

**(Verse 3 not on the song on the link)**

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**Hymn (Sung or Read): “The Servant Song” (TFWS #2222)**

**1. Brother let me be your servant,**

**Let me be as Christ to you.**

**Pray that I might have the grace**

**To let you be my servant, too.**

**2. We are pilgrims on a journey.**

**We are brothers on the road.**

**We are here to help each other**

**Walk the mile and bear the load.**

**3. I will hold the Christ-light for you**

**In the nighttime of your fear.**

**I will hold my hand out to you;**

**Speak the peace you long to hear.**

**4. I will weep when you are weeping.**

**When you laugh, I'll laugh with you.**

**I will share your joy and sorrow**

**Til we've seen this journey through.**

**5. When we sing to God in heaven,**

**We shall find such harmony**

**Born of all we've known together**

**Of Christ's love and agony.**

**6. Brother let me be your servant,**

**Let me be as Christ to you.**

**Pray that I might have the grace**

**To let you be my servant, too.**

**Benediction/Sending Forth**:

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in the knowledge and love of God, and of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord; and the blessing of God Almighty, the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit, be among you and remain with you always. Amen.

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 **Reminders**

Excerpts from Pastor Bob’s letter of June 13th 2020

Our Church building is opened for Worship Service.

There are changes both to the building and to the worship service. These are meant to help us worship and fellowship in a manner that will enable us to protect each other, especially the most vulnerable among us while providing us with the opportunity to worship together.

When you come to worship, please either wear your own mask or one provide to you and keep a safe, 6 ft. distance between yourself and those not in your household. Once you are seated, feel free to remove your mask, but please keep faithful to the social distancing guidelines.

Upon arrival, you will need to answer **NO** to three screening questions:

1) Have you had any COVID-19 symptoms in past 14 days (Fever or chills, Cough, Shortness of breath or difficulty breathing, Fatigue, Muscle or body aches, Headache, New loss of taste or smell, Sore throat, Congestion or runny nose, Nausea or vomiting, Diarrhea;

 2) Positive COVID-19 test in past 14 days;

3) And/or close contact with confirmed or suspected COVID-19 case in past 14 days.

When you feel comfortable please join your church family for Worship Service.

If you have any questions you may contact Pastor Bob at 518-310-0843

Just a reminder ... you may send your weekly church offering to Sherb. His address is:

Sherb House

641 Stetson Road

Chazy, NY 12921.

Your check should be made out to Three Steeples United Methodist Church

