

## **Introduction**

- \* wrestling like Jacob seems topical: rugby, Parliament
- \* Jesus says the parable is about the need to pray and not lose heart.
- \* Both readings also about the nature of prayer. Often seen as a gentle, pious activity, but very different here
- \* prayer shown as a necessary struggle, in which we seek a loving and just God face to face

## **Jacob and the widow**

- \* stole Esau of his birthright. Has come to make up, but is afraid
- \* wrestles with a “man”, May have thought he was Esau himself, but understands him to be God by the end
- \* wrestle to a standstill. Only Jacob can release hold over God, and only God can bless him
- \* God names him “Israel” - “one who strives with God”
- \* the widow strives too, with the unjust judge, but as a metaphor for persistence in prayer. Just as Jacob is blessed, so she will receive justice. If an unjust human like the judge will respond to persistence, God will surely respond so much more

## **Difficulty with prayer?**

- \* you may be wrestling like Jacob, with a difficult meeting ahead, or decision to make, or a long term burden you carry
- \* we are “not to lose heart”, but isn’t it understandable when we do? Why should our relationship with God be a struggle? Why does prayer often seem unanswered? (*read RS Thomas poem “Folk tale”*)
- \* if losing heart because of your own suffering and struggle, the readings assure us that not only does God hear us, but more fundamentally he is with us in the struggle. The gospel as a whole tells us that Jesus is always with us in suffering. God takes human form in wrestling with Jacob so is constrained by human weakness, just as Jesus was in suffering and dying on the cross
- \* Jacob’s ability to hold his own in the struggle, and being blessed reassures him that he can also hold his own with Esau. His injury shows his bravery and also God’s mercy on him
- \* or we may be “losing heart” because prayer seems unanswered. Here the example of the widow is the clue - if our prayer is for justice, then God hears and will act. Nature of this life is that this may not be in a timescale of our choosing, but he will act.

## Or 'lack of faith?'

- \* however we may have a problem with prayer because we pray for matters of self interest rather than justice, or because we haven't really tried very hard with prayer. Jesus asks "will the son of man find faith on earth?" - our lack of trust also means we don't see when prayers are answered. When health improves or we get the job offer we were seeking we tend to see that as the result of the skill of another or ourselves, not of God
- \* the truth revealed here is that it is only by persisting in prayer that we truly engage with God. Our easy preference is to be self sufficient and for God to answer us quickly when we do bother to talk to Him, and it is only in crying out to and wrestling with Him that we truly engage with Him. God persists with us, and will never give up on us, so we are not to give up on Him.

## Summary

- \* look afresh at prayer; (*read George Herbert poem "Prayer"*)
- \* take those things you are wrestling with, and bring them afresh to God
- \* try a new way - online resources, daily prayer app, psalms, writing/drawing your protest
- \* be assured that God in Christ is in the struggle, in the prayer
- \* Jacob does encounter Esau and reconciliation does take place. He says to Esau that "to see your face is like seeing the face of God". May that be our experience as we grapple afresh with our loving and just creator in the days to come