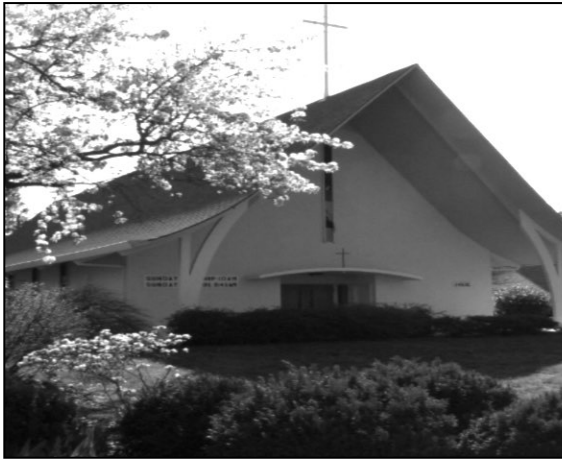




Pentecost 19

**October 19, 2025 (HEALTH SUNDAY)
St. Timothy Lutheran Church, Portland, OR**

**THE LESSONS: Genesis 32:22-31;
Psalm 121; 2 Timothy
3:14-4:5; Luke 18:1-8**

**THE SERMON: “Wrestling with...
God...”**

Grace and Peace to you in the NAME of GOD: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

INTRODUCTION

I don't know about you men here if you have a wife like Marilyn, who nags me all the time about exercising and eating right. That's like that healthy 80-year-old man who went to for his annual checkup and his doctor was amazed at how good the man looked and felt. "You're in incredible shape!" the doctor exclaimed. "You don't drink, you don't smoke, you don't eat greasy foods and you've stayed married to the same woman for 50 years. I've never seen anyone with such dedication to a healthy lifestyle." The doctor continued, "With your regimen, you could live to be 100." The man looked at the doctor, a little crestfallen. "Why would I want to do that?" he replied. The doctor, a little taken aback, asked, "What do you mean? You've devoted your whole life to a healthy lifestyle. Don't you want to see the fruits of your labor?" The man sighed. "You don't understand. I hate kale, I hate jogging, I hate drinking so much water." A little confused, the doctor asked, "So, why do you do it; don't you want to live to be 100?" The man shook his head and sighed, "I don't want to be 100. I just do all this to keep my wife quiet."

Luke 18:1-8

This sounds a little like the judge in today's gospel, doesn't it? To make a point about praying and not losing heart, Jesus tells a parable about a judge who didn't fear God and didn't care about what people thought about him. But, then a widow came to him asking for justice against an

accuser. And, she's relentless and keeps nagging him so Jesus tells us that the judge finally decides, "Though I have no fear of God and no respect for anyone, yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will grant her justice, so that she may not wear me out by continually coming." Then, Jesus concludes by saying, "And will not God grant justice to his chosen ones who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long in helping them? ... And yet, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?" What is Jesus telling us? I can understand that he's urging us to be persistent in our prayers, but why does Jesus wonder if he will find faith when he returns? Jesus knows he will find faith when he returns, but I think he wants us to ask ourselves what that faith will look like. To a lot of American Christians faith is coming to church every Sunday or to read our Bibles and our Portals of Prayer every day or just showing up and volunteering at church ministries. And, some Christians think they can obey all of the Ten Commandments. I suppose faith is all those things but I think in his gospel Luke wants us to think about what faith is, because faith is even more than all those practices.

Genesis 32:22-31

But, what does our first lesson has to do with faith? On his way back to Palestine from what is now Iraq, Jacob sends his family and servants ahead of him. Then, the priests who wrote Genesis tell us. "Jacob was left alone, and a man wrestled with him until daybreak. When the man saw that he did not prevail against Jacob, he struck him on the hip socket, and Jacob's hip was put out of joint as he wrestled with him." Like the nagging widow, Jacob refused to quit. They struggled all night and at daybreak the stranger says, "Let me go, for the day is breaking." But Jacob said, "I will not let you go, unless you bless me... Then the man said, "You shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel, for you have striven with God and with humans and have prevailed." I'm sure other preachers have told you that "Israel" means "the one who wrestles with God." Maybe that's what Jesus was getting at when he asked, "... when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?" Will God find us wrestling with God?" While the book of Hebrews tells us, "Faith shows the reality of what we hope for; it is the evidence of things we cannot see," This Old Testament lesson tells us that sometimes we struggle because we cannot see what God has for us. We wrestle with God

because God's will isn't always what we want. Sometimes I complain to God because I see life as a glass half empty and not half full as Tevye did in "Fiddler on the Roof" when he sarcastically asserted, "It may sound like I'm complaining, but I'm not. After all, with Your help, I'm starving to death".

2 Timothy 3:14-17

Maybe Timothy complained to Paul in our epistle lesson, because we know that Timothy was being challenged in his ministry by older leaders who questioned him because they were older. And, some of them were teaching things that would later be considered heretical in the Church. So, we can guess that Timothy's faith was being challenged, so he was probably wrestling with God. That's why today's lesson has a pastoral tone when Paul wrote, "... continue in what you have learned and firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it... All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, so that the person of God may be proficient, equipped for every good work." That's a problem with much of current American Christianity; we have been so influenced by politics and our self-absorption that our devotion looks more like our politics and not Christ's gospel. Paul reminds Timothy to get back to the basics - to continue in what he was taught by Paul and to remember that all scripture trains us for righteousness so we may be proficient in our faith and equipped for every good work. In other words, when God's Word in scripture speaks to us, what we do will be empowered and directed by God. Like Jacob (Israel), when we wrestle with God through scripture and prayer, God will change us so that our will begins to look more and more like God's will.

Psalms 121, The Call and the Challenge

So, as Jesus asked, will he find that kind of "wrestling" faith when he returns? We know that the "going through the motions" kind of faith is a spiritual sickness. It's not healthy Christianity. It's the spiritual sickness that Mother Theresa saw when she visited the United States in 1985 to receive the Presidential Medal of Freedom. In our psalm this morning, the supposed traditional author, David asks, "I lift up my eyes to the hills - from where is my help to come?" In our time today, where do most

Americans think our help comes? We know that even some Christians will say that our help will come from the Democrats, while others will say the Republicans. Because we know this is one of the Songs of Ascent, we know that faithful Jewish pilgrims would recite this and other psalms as they trudged up the steep steps into the Holy City. In such a time like this in America, like those faithful pilgrims and David, we are in an uphill struggle asserting that "(Our) help comes from the Lord, the maker of heaven and earth. The Lord will not let (our) foot be moved... As we ascend into the presence of God, David says that the Lord our God will preserve us from all evil and will watch over us forever. I don't know about you but, when I see today's news, I worry and get frustrated and I wrestle with God. How can I believe that God is in control when I see all the violence and division and chaos? And, I wonder how those struggling with cancer or other terminal illnesses have the courage and strength to believe. That's why the writer of Hebrews reminds us, "Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see." That's why Jesus reminded his disciples to be persistent in prayer. But, this doesn't mean to keep telling God what we want; what Jesus is suggesting to his followers is that we keep wrestling with our struggles until we are changed so that God's will becomes our will. That's why a few weeks ago, the prophet Habakkuk heard God say to him, "... For there is still a vision for the appointed time... If it seems to tarry, wait for it; it will surely come..." When we have this kind of confidence in God, then we will not be anxious and troubled by things, we will have the spiritual health that Mother Theresa was talking about. God will not "nag" us to be spiritually healthy. As it reminds us in Proverbs, "A cheerful heart is good medicine, but a crushed spirit dries up the bones or, as John Steinbeck wrote, "A sad soul can kill you quicker, far quicker than a germ." So, on this Health Ministry Sunday, our hymn reminds us that we come to God for healing - body, mind, and soul. We come to a loving God in times of distress and pain and heals with His grace. God wants us to be happy because, when we are in synch with God, we're healthy in mind and spirit.(Hymn 617: We Come to You for Healing, Lord)