



# FINDING OUR BLESSING

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# Scripture Passage

## Genesis 32:22-31

The same night he got up and took his two wives, his two maids, and his eleven children, and crossed the ford of the Jabbok. He took them and sent them across the stream, and likewise everything that he had. 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. Then he said, "Let me go, for the day is breaking." But Jacob said, "I will not let you go, unless you bless me." So he said to him, "What is your name?" And he said, "Jacob." 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." Then Jacob asked him, "Please tell me your name." But he said, "Why is it that you ask my name?" And there he blessed him. So Jacob called the place Peniel, saying, "For I have seen God face to face, and yet my life is preserved." The sun rose upon him as he passed Peniel, limping because of his hip.

NRSV



# Sermon

## Finding Our Blessing

There were 2 funerals this past week. One that was well known and in the news. The other a member of our own St. Timothy congregation.

John Lewis was a lifelong crusader for justice, dignity and human worth of all people. From a young age he persisted and fought for the civil rights of his own African-American people and eventually for all Americans. He was a student leader on the national stage. He eventually became known as the “conscious” of Congress.

As Brim prayed, Young-Sun Lee was an early 1st generation immigrant from Korea, the father of two daughters - Caroline and Linda - and the grandfather to three lovely grandchildren: Emily, Gabby and Maddie. He went through many challenges. Reverend Kim shared this at the burial. He lived through the Korean War as an adolescent, grew up in the aftermath of that and was an early immigrant to Canada; he came in the 1960s. He had a lot of

challenges, but he loved his church, served the church as an Elder, and he was faithful until the end.

Both lives were so different in scale and scope of what they did. But in their own ways, their lives were a blessing to those around them. Their lives touched others, and made this world a better place. We can confidently say that they were blessed.

## **To Be Blessed**

I reflected on what made these two very different lives so blessed. And I came to realize this: they lived their lives with freedom. Freedom to love, freedom to pursue their convictions, freedom to serve others. They were not driven by fear, but freedom. And in this freedom, they found who they really were. Being who they were is what made them blessed. And with this blessing, they blessed those around them.

I think to be blessed is to know who you really are and to embrace it. When you know who you really are, you can give that real self to the world and be a blessing to it. The world will be blessed by the beautiful gift that you are.

Many times we don't know who we really are, because we're trapped by many things, such as our fear and apathy. We are not free. Because of our fear, we begin to live lives of calculation, not freedom. We calculate what will give us advantage. What will help us survive. Because of apathy and because of being comfortable, we don't bother to wrestle with who we are and what we're all about.

## Life of Calculation

I look at a lot of young people these days, and sometimes my heart gets a little heavy, because I see that at such a young age, a lot of their thinking is so calculated. So much of their thinking is driven by what will get them to that next level. What will help them advance. Or what might happen if they don't do this or that. What happened to the days where we just did what we did because we enjoyed it. I think that's become harder and harder to do. Underneath all of this calculation is real deep fear. Fear of failure, fear of financial instability, fear of some sort. Or we slip into apathy. We know there are things around us, but we just become indifferent to what goes on around us.

I believe that fear and apathy are deeply connected to

the fact that we don't know who we really are, or we don't believe in the true value of who we are. Think about it, many of us don't believe they have anything to offer this world unless we have things like money or influence or power. In other words, we are relying on what we can obtain, not who we are as the gift to this world.

Today's passage is the culminating passage for Jacob. This is the place where he discovers his true identity as Israel - the one who strives with God. As Jacob, he was merely a deceiver, a calculator, but here, you see the emergence of his real self as the one who strives with God. In discovering who he really was - in finding his own blessing - he became a blessing for those to follow him. His descendants were to be called Israel. Finding your true identity is not just about you - it's about how you bless the world.

Do we really believe that? Do you believe that you - not your money, not your talent, not your ability - but YOU, the individual, are to be the blessing in this world? That is what faith at the essence is. Believing that God created me fearfully and wonderfully, intentionally by design and for a purpose. The question is not

discovering what that purpose is, but discovering who I really am and embracing that. When you discover who you are, your purpose will come alive and you will be a blessing to others.

## Wrestling with Struggles

Today's passage offers a very clear truth about how we find ourselves. We can only find ourselves after we wrestle and struggle with whatever is blocking the way to our true identity. Most of the time, these things are our greatest, deep-down, fears and our apathy. There really is no other way than to struggle. I'm sorry to say that there's no easy answer. Jacob's greatest obstacle was his life of calculating and running away. He had spent his whole life running away and living with calculation. It was that calculating mind that lead him to run away in the first place. He stole Esau's blessing, that was his brother, and he deceived his father to get that blessing, and Esau wanted to kill him so he had to run away. When he ran away he spent many years with his uncle Laban. He struggled so much because he had met his match as a calculator. Laban was very crafty too so there was a lot of back and forth, back and forth. But God had promised Jacob that 'you will

return to this land and this is where I will bless you and your descendants'. So in a way Jacob knew that he had to go back. He had run away for so many years but, at the end, he just realized he had to go back. But to go back, he had to confront and wrestle with the greatest fear he had, which was confronting his brother Esau. There was no more escape. He tried to appease Esau, he sent all these caravans in front of him and messengers saying 'this is for you Esau. But Esau's response was that he's coming with 400 of his men, like an army basically. So Jacob was deathly afraid. He was all alone after sending everyone ahead of him and there no was no place left to go. He had to confront, wrestle with and struggle with this fear. There was no more room for calculation, only struggle. But struggle he did, and he prevailed. Even after having his hip socket come out of the joint, in this struggle with his greatest fear he found himself. Not only that, through this struggle is where he met God.

Human beings, our nature is to avoid struggle. It's tough and challenging. I think in this context, this avoidance of struggle is greatly aided by powerful companies who profit from our attention. Mindless hours on our devices and entertainment take our



hearts and minds away from struggling with our deepest fears and our apathy. There's always something to push aside this struggle.

I think our biggest struggle today is against the tendency to avoid struggle in the first place. People like Young-Sun Lee and John Lewis struggled their whole lives. Their struggles defined who they were. In their struggles they found freedom and discovered who they really were. To be human is to have deep fears. We would not be human otherwise. But to be fully human is to struggle and overcome those fears, and in that struggle, find who we really are.

## Struggles Lead to Finding Your Identity

Rev. Paulette sent me a text last night about Emancipation Day. Many people of Caribbean descent celebrate this day when slaves across the islands were emancipated from British slavery. She first sent me this picture:



She described it like this: “In Jamaica there is an Emancipation Park. They commissioned an artist to do a work of art. The outcome of a Black woman facing a Black man, naked. The upper class people literally died.” She went on to say: “Today we remember our ancestors - enslaved and freed who did not passively accept plantation slavery. Consistent resistance, activism, rebellions and strategic interventions. They forced the British Colonial government to pass the Act for the Emancipation of Enslaved Africans. Emerging from a common system of white oppression, this Black woman and Black man face each other in Emancipation Park, Jamaica.

Symbolically stripped of the stuff of the past they face each other, no whip, no white presence. Sheer Blackness. Forging a future of hope and justice together is our challenge and hope. Happy Emancipation Day!" Thank you, sister Paulette, for sharing those beautiful words and allowing me to share that.

I am thankful that those slaves that fought and struggled. Because, through that struggle and their eventual freedom, many of us in Canada are blessed by their presence among us. You see, struggle leads to finding who you are, and that blessing will bless others.

The enslaved Africans of the Caribbean had to wrestle with their fears and misery. They had to wrestle against passively accepting their lot in life. Like Jacob they wrestled. When they did, they discovered who they were: beautiful Black people made in the image of God. From that identity came their conviction and courage to fight the unjust system of slavery and oppression. Their new identity inspired countless others to embrace their identity and keep fighting for freedom. They found their blessing, and became a blessing for people to come.



# The Blessing

Everyone who has found their blessing and became a blessing for people has gone through such a struggle. There is no way around it. Our Lord Jesus struggled in the Garden of Gethsemane. He prayed three times that the cup of death pass away from him. Yet each time, he concluded with, “yet not my will but your will be done.” In this struggle with his greatest fear, he found his true identity as the Son of God. That identity as the Son of God has become the greatest blessing for us, those who are worshipping today. Because of the blessing of Jesus’ identity, we can find hope in our fears. Because of this blessing, strangers can come together and worship together in a spirit of oneness, with love and mutuality. Because of the blessing of Jesus, we have a new message, that our greatest fear is actually the place of transformation into our identity and blessing.

God wants to bless all of us. This blessing is not in material wealth or well-being. This blessing is in our identity, of knowing who we are. And when we have received that blessing, we will be a blessing to the world and those around us. Let us struggle against our greatest fears and against our apathy. Let us not run



away or give up. Like Jacob, keep struggling, let us not give up but prevail. And God will indeed bless us when we discover our true identity. May God's Spirit bless your lives and make it rich and bountiful. Amen.