

Sermon 8.2.20 Pastor Jordan Gades Matthew 14:13-21

Grace and Peace be to you from God our father and our Lord Jesus Christ Amen

So, this morning we have another story of Jacob. And I'm not talking about that one Jacob you used to know back in the day. No, I'm talking about the patriarch Jacob. So, if you were with us last week you know I talked a bit about Jacob then as well and maybe you are getting a little confused but there is something that must be said about Jacob, must be named as we begin. Without Jacob we don't get Jesus. Jesus did not come to this earth randomly. Jesus is the fulfilment of the promises of God that started with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. But that also means we have deal with Jacob. I came across this great quote about Jacob that I wanted to share:

“The character of Jacob is deeply enigmatic for many Christian readers. Throughout the stories of Genesis 25—31, we have seen Jacob con, cheat, deceive, and manipulate virtually every member of his family and then run off when the tension was about to explode into full conflict. The fact that Jacob seems to get away with this bad behavior and also garner promises, wives, children and household goods in the process only increases the reader's ambivalence about this ancestor of Israel.”

[Amy Merrill Willis](#)

And that really is the truth. In today's story, it's a pretty big one. The wrestling with God incident. But what has to be said and isn't in our reading is that when Jacob sent everyone across the river first, he was really putting them up as sacrificial lambs. Jacob thought that when he crossed the river he was going to be attacked and killed by his big brother for massively conning him a couple of decades prior. So, what does he do, sends everyone across the river while he waits safely on this side, and waits to see what his brother will do. We could gloss over that fact. We could whitewash this story and just talk about how Jacob was strong ambitious man and really wanted that blessing from God and wrestled him all night long to get it, but we lose something important when we do that. When we talk about the story of Jacob, we are talking about the history of our faith, what it means to be a follower of God. With Jacob we see a human being trying to live out a heavenly destiny.

We are doing something important right there. We are naming him a human being, with all the faults and flaws that come with every single one of us. This isn't the story of God walking among mortals, this is the story of one man, like us, whom we can probably see ourselves in too clearly.

And this moves us to the core of what we are talking about today. Naming the truth of something. Name what the thing really deeply is. Name what needs to happen. Name what is going on. Naming is important! God renaming people are some of the most important parts of the bible and show the points of focus for the readers.

So, God names Jacob Israel - Jacob is the patriarch of the people of God and yet these people will be the people who will wrestle with their God for millennia to come. This is a nation of God wrestlers. And we are carriers of that name, we are the ones who wrestle with our God, not just to receive blessing but we wrestle in understanding and in hope, in peace and in justice. We want to understand but sometimes it does not come no matter how hard we wrestle with

God and we must take what we have been so graciously given and cross the river and see what happens next.

Naming also signifies what matters, what is the truth that we all know, what is the action that we should all take. Jesus did and does that.

Sometimes Jesus is just going to name something and then expect what seems impossible from us. He did it to the disciples in today's story; You feed them, you feed these 5000 people. You take on the problems of the world and you take on the problems of your community and you take on the problems of your neighbors. And that is what God is doing in our hearts right now. We look around our streets and neighborhoods and we can see and hear what God is calling us to do. And we try and meet those challenges. Like how the area churches years ago came together and formed the food shelf that feeds the people in our midst. Or how the Community meals got started and have expanded over and over again. And how we have been able to partner with the farmers markets and other food programs. We have heard the problem of hungry people beside us in our schools, in our stores and in our town. And so, we endeavor against these problems with God working with us.

Did we fix any of these problems by ourselves? Did it just magically happen. No! We as a church saw the problem. We named it as something that we were called to. And we prayed. We opened our doors. Those beginning sparks acted as a catalyst to First's identity in this community as a place that is open to all and a place where you can be fed, both physically and spiritually.

And we are going to keep working in this mission to make sure that the name of Hunger diminishes in community until it is forgotten.

But then our work will not be done, for there are always problems to be named and acted upon. If you want the schools to be open and stay open, wear a mask, if you want businesses to reopen and stay open, wear a mask, if you want this church to throw open its doors and sing and shout our alleluias with such strength and power and too make these walls shake as much as I do, then wear a mask. These masks are a way to show love to your neighbors. They are not shackles; they are gifts and blessings that we bestow on each other.

Covid is here. It is real. It has killed 157,000 Americans so far. It is in this town and area. And its time that we work together for the benefit of our neighbors, for our sisters and our brothers, for our children and our grandparents, for our friends and family. It's time to step up and be the catalyst for better tomorrow.

I know we are all human, so was Jacob, and we all are weak and have our flaws; we all have those things which could divide us and separate us and hurt us. But have something else. We also are joined together by the Holy Spirit and purified by our God. We have the creator of the heavens and the earth and everything in the earth down to the itty bitty ants working beside us, with us, magnifying every act that we do to build the Kingdom of our Lord here on Earth. It's time to work. Amen.