

“To Walk With God”  
Sermon for 24 May 2020  
Text: Genesis 32:22-232

Walking with God is introduced biblically through God’s daily companionship with Adam and Eve—they walked together in the cool of the day. Not a very complicated idea. It suggests a familiar activity, walking with a friend, meaning companionship, intimacy, sharing, mutual delight and dialogue strung on the line of physical activity. In this manner the resurrected Lord appeared alongside the two disciples on the Emmaus Road (Luke 24). The disciples had the experience of walking alongside Jesus on their preaching, ministry tours and as they did so they walk with someone who **walked with God** in a deeper, more spiritual sense. That’s the sense we want to pick up on today. In Genesis 48 Jacob says:

**15 The God before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac walked,  
The God *who has been my shepherd* [lit. from the continuance of me ] *all my  
life to this day*, 16 The angel who has redeemed me from all evil. . .**

This portion of his blessing on Joseph and his grandsons highlights two things from our Genesis passage today: 1. that the patriarchs were distinguished by **walking with God** and 2. that Jacob realized that the Lord was his own shepherd. The patriarchs were also shepherds! A pastoral, “root” distinction and not *merely* a rural, agrarian and farming life—as opposed to urban life—a cultural, occupational setting for their theology. In addition to the patriarchs, we know that Enoch, Noah, Elijah and the sons of Levi, all **walked with God**, meaning that they had a personal and experiential relationship with God. This speaks to me personally because the person who led me to the Lord Jesus spoke of “walking with Jesus as if Jesus were her friend and street companion.” And she did so invitingly that I was moved to ask for my own friendship with Jesus and I have been walking with the Lord over forty-five years and counting. Nothing compares to spending time with, walking with the lover of your soul! It is **walking with Jesus that integrates our being:** heart, mind, soul, spirit, affections, desires and grants meaning to life, significance, direction, value and purpose. **In him, all things cohere** (Col 1:17) . . . **integrate and hold together**. Bringing a conclusion to this matter, we might assert: That to walk with God is to love integrity.

That is to say, *not merely to seek it, and desire integrity* but to **love integrity**—to allow that love to be the **shaping and defining motivation** for how you think, what you believe and what you do.

A dear friend and brother in Christ, while lamenting the sad state of things in America, politically speaking, cried out, “But what can we do? We’ll never see justice. They have all the power!”

*Suddenly*, from a depth I was quite unaware of, I responded, “What are you saying? That is so unbiblical. . . enough to force me to ask, ‘Are you even a Christian!’ First of all, tell me truly now, “Who has all the power?”

He answered, “I know, we the people.”

“No. You know no such thing, my friend. Biblically, who has all the power?”  
“Oh,” came the meek response, “God.”

“That’s right, our Father in heaven has all the power—that’s what it means to be omnipotent. So God has all the power and unless you are thinking biblically you might just forget *to whom we are to turn* when we ask for vindication, protection, and our sure defense. **The name of the Lord is a strong tower, and the righteous run into it and they are saved.** That’s Proverbs 18:10. Our *spiritual adversaries*, those opposed to us politically, militarily, culturally, internationally, *they do not have the power, God does.* So, what are you declaring, or expressing when you say ‘They have all the power?’”

“What a faithless, ignorant, biblically illiterate and stupid thing to say.” I agreed.

“That brings us to your “we will never see justice.” I have three things to say: firstly, justice has already been served in this present world order, with all its corruption and perversion! Your salvation is proof of it! The bible teaches us that justice was served when Jesus died on the cross bearing the penalty due our sin, our crimes and our transgressions. The guilty verdict was passed on him as he bore our sins in our place, the sentence was pronounced and the punishment was justly administered: he died in our place, cancelling the writ and God’s justice was served. The debt paid in full, we are absolved of all legal obligation—that’s justice!

Jesus is our purchase price. Jesus is our Emancipation Proclamation written in his blood! Jesus is our Liberator who, by his death, has set us forever free In him, for all who believe, there is perfect liberty—first holy and forgiven, then free!

AND we get to go free because justice has been served. The problem of evil has been dealt with at the tribunal of God and the Evil One lost his case. Secondly, Jesus Christ, **the very one who obtained justice for us**, is returning to this world *to complete the destruction* of the works of the Devil, and to vindicate the Father’s will with the complete the triumph of justice in the creation of a new heaven and a new earth. A new creation, in which sin, evil, criminality—abolishing all slavery, bondage, exploitation, greed and oppression (every form of injustice known on earth!). Every work of wickedness, all unrighteousness is abolished and every believing soul set free. This is what will be established in the last day. The great news of this legal victory, and our acquittal is the good news we have to share and all who are willing to believe it shall share in the acquittal.” Thirdly, if we believe on Jesus, we are by faith joined to him eternally—we obtain eternal life because we shared in his nature, his being everlastingly! Listen to me carefully, the day is coming when our criminal justice system *will be held accountably to God and in that day truth and justice shall prevail—that will be the day of Jubilee!* Justice has been done, once for all, and injustice shall be eliminated as forgiveness and reconciliation are established by Christ forever and ever. The glorious and endless reign of the Lord Jesus!

The dawn approaches when Jesus shall come and his glory shall lighten the entire world.” “That’s the plan,” concluded my friend, “thank you for reminding me.”

“So let’s get on with praying for the lost, the blind and the spiritually dead—those who are enslaved, regardless of race or ethnicity (!); those in chaos, facing lives of disintegration. Let us seek the *conversion* of the criminally-minded (apart from which there is no reformation!) and we shall have more peace in society.” So what we know (justice has been served. . . Jesus is coming again. and that by faith we have eternal life) has a direct effect on us, on what we think and say and do. On how we walk with God.

We are forgiven, acquitted and free but no one would know it unless we confess it—state what we know plainly. ***Be ready to give answer for the hope that is in us!*** (1 Peter 3:15)

## II.

To walk with God, or, more accurately, in Jacob's case to limp with God, is to love integrity.

Have we, in our spiritual journey so far, moved beyond wanting integrity, and desiring integrity ***to loving integrity?*** Don't know?

I guess we can take a hint from deciding which side of the river we are on. Are we still on the bank of self-reliance, living by our skills, wit and cunning? Are we still aiming at our autonomy, and independent living? Or, have we run up against the full force of our habits of the heart, the consequences of our past choices and the threat of full exposure in the face of an approaching brother like Esau, and passed over to the near side? Coming to the end of ourselves serves as a great definition for HUMILITY. What we see in today's passage is Jacob's turning to God ***and when he does this, notice what happens: God draws near to him! God meets with him, wrestles with him and changes him—God converts Jacob and renames him as Israel. God is the rewarder of them who seek Him.*** (Hebrews 11:6) After Jacob sincerely humbles himself (which God demands of us all), everything changes.

***What we love defines our life***, this according to Jesus. So, *really*, do we love Jesus more than our life, our possessions, wealth, activities, artistic pursuits, credentials (that "passport to privilege"), our connections, our friends and family? Do we love God as Jacob does? ***The God who has been my shepherd!*** Jacob declares. Is God your shepherd?

You see, the rubber is just hitting the road for Jacob in today's reading. Because Esau with four hundred men is not the only force approaching. Jehovah is approaching. This is the moment of conversion for Jacob. Either he is going to be changed into a man of God/believer—which, in turn, changes everything—or he is not. Change or be slaughtered? But what if, let's suppose, *before* Esau can get to him, Jacob repents, is converted and by divine intervention becomes a new creature—someone Esau *will* sense is no cheat, no deceiver, no longer a schemer—but a trustworthy man, a servant of God? Or, in keeping with my theme, Jacob, a man of integrity? What if the man Esau "sees" isn't "here comes trouble" anymore but rather, oh my, "a man of integrity?" The lack of association in the future may be on Esau, and not on Jacob, the friend of God. I would even suggest that Esau fears Jacob *and no the other way around. Jacob had power with God!*

Let's suppose that your eyes were suddenly opened and what you "see" is grace sculpting you through time. Gradually God's plan for you comes into view, the form and shape of it. Then you might say, rightly, *I am not the man I used to be*—God has bettered me, improved me! Truly divinely improved is divinely approved. **YES**, through it all, the mishaps, the mistakes—sins and moral failures—good and bad all trending in the same direction (God's good, for you)

This character transformation/***soul conversion*** appears to happen overnight— yes, over one restless, sleepless night. I say *appears* because God has actually been working on the Jacob project for years and years. It was nothing like the trials of Job before, or the sufferings of Christ later *but Jacob was afflicted*. Laban's household was a crucible in

which God's refining fires burned off the dross and purified Jacob. Jacob's afflictions, trials and mishaps in business, a treacherous employer, change wages—loneliness, poverty, a life of flight patterns—all aimed at bringing him to this place, at this time, to this appointed spiritual crisis. ***What if "God's never giving up on him" "is the key to grasping Jacob, the "grasper," brought to this juncture?*** Is this possibly a word of encouragement to someone today?! Does this explain in part what you may have been going through?

God had get Jacob to this place of "I can't," or, to the place of abject surrender, to the place where he could create space in his life for God to act for him *and pray*. God's character was assuredly better than his. God's promises were surer than Jacob's contracts. God's "mighty rule" plus God's heart of grace for lost sinners were matters "out of mind" to Jacob earlier on. He was too busy scheming, plotting and planning. *Sadly, Jacob may not be the only one spiritually beleaguered in this way?* I am reminded now of the inane bumper sticker: "God is my co-pilot." How much saner we would be if we aspired to be *God's co-pilot* and left him fly the plane! Jacob feared Esau because he believed that Esau had all the power (even as Laban had recently boasted. **I have the power to do thee harm, but the God of your fathers warned me. . .**). Jacob was wrong about that.

Anyway today's wrestling match unfolds in two stages, the first separated from the second by the blow delivered to Jacob's thigh. The first stage is undertaken in silence, with no verbal exchanges, **there a man wrestled with him until the breaking of day.** (v.24) This mysterious antagonist wrestles with Jacob *in a physical manner*. This makes Jacob's encounter more "real"—locatable in terms of time, place and sequence of events/history! *It is palpably "real."* *It is a thing felt, seen, endured, held, gone through—a condescension of the Lord to Jacob's humanity<sup>1</sup>.* ***Like a walk in the cool of the day!***

It is God who speaks and acts through "this Man." The wrestling match is a culmination of the life-long struggle of Jacob's life: ***his struggle with God—"Israel"***; or, his struggle between his spiritual side and his fleshly nature. Signifying what God wanted to do with him, in him and for him in order to work through him. There is a resistance in Jacob to be overthrown! ***It is a very stubborn matter.*** So stubborn that it takes a wound to move things forward. That is the beginning of the end for the life of nature and self that held Jacob fast. He trusted in his own cunning, quick-wittedness, his shrewdness and success only recently had he begun to attribute it to **divine mercies and revelations of truth** (v.10) which followed on his insights: **Unless the God of my father, the God of Abraham and the Fear of Isaac had been with me** (31:42) and **the God of my father has been with me** (31:4). Again, this God talk is very recent—a matter of days, not weeks. Jacob needed to learn that **by strength shall no man prevail** (1 Samuel 2:9)! And, apparently, he needed to learn this first hand. ***This failure of natural power is the turning point in this wrestling match—it signifies the occasion when Jacob turning from reliance on himself and craftiness to faith: to reliance on God.*** *It was then that God the Antagonist*

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<sup>1</sup> Speaking of afflictions, when I was sixteen, I nearly died of acute appendicitis, I was in a coma for four, or five days. When I regained consciousness, through a tunnel of light(?), the first person I saw was Ellie French, my lovely young nurse. I asked, "Am I in heaven?" "No," she said, "why do you ask?" I replied, "Because you look like an angel to me." But that was only the beginning. It took appendicitis to awaken me to the wonder, beauty and joy of just being alive in such a world as this! To this day I think of dandelions as being made of gold. Ellie brought me a wilted bouquet of dandelions to celebrate spring and we laughed so hard we cried. They looked so pitiful in their Dixie cup vase. That moment spoke to my humanity in terms that my humanity could understand—that's what's meant by condescension. Sometimes I have to sing!

*becomes his Friend, his Ally and Advocate.* No one gets out of the mess we are in on our own! The strength Jacob needs from here on out must come from God, not from within—although it would appear he occasionally regresses to his “old ways.” He prevails because God wills it so.

### III.

It appears that God sometimes appears to his people and then expresses his desire to leave, to move on. . . unless.

This happens on the Emmaus Road—it appeared as if Jesus would **have gone on**. (Luke 24:28) Earlier on the Sea of Galilee, during the stormy passage, he made as if he would **pass on by walking on the water** (Mark 6:48) Yet in both instances, the Lord *stayed on* because his disciples wished him to remain. Have we not sung, “The Lord be with you ‘til we meet again?” I believe that this same disclosure of longing lies behind David’s cry in Psalm 101:2: **Oh, when will you come to me?** *It is a cry for friendship with God, continued companionship—a first time occurrence in Jacob’s life.* “The desire to retain God binds Him to us.” (A. Maclaren, Vol. 1, p.227-8)

I wonder are your departures from seasons of prayer marked by a reluctance to move on? Mine do. Maybe God wants to hear your, “No, don’t go . . . not just yet.” Why is that? It is because we were created for companionship, *for walking with God*. What a comfort this is in a world where friends are often departing unexpectedly and finally. Friendship circles first shrink and then dissolve. . . like an aging high school reunion group. . . the participants just walking off the stage waving their diploma. We wonder if we will ever see each other again. . . ever. . . other than in dreams, or yearbook recollections of faded yesteryears. **This is the generation of them that seek him . . . but where is God?** (line lyric from Dave Brubeck’s “Light in the Wilderness”) From Job 23:

3 “Oh that I knew where I might find Him,  
That I might come to His seat!

4 “I would present my case before Him  
And fill my mouth with arguments.

. . .

8 “Behold, I go forward but He is not there,  
And backward, but I cannot perceive Him;  
9 When He acts on the left, I cannot behold Him;  
He turns on the right, I cannot see Him.

10 “But He knows the [a]way I take;  
When He has tried me, I shall come forth as gold.

. . .

13 “But He is unique and who can turn Him?  
And what His soul desires, that He does.

14 “For He performs what is appointed for me,  
And many such decrees are with Him.

15 “Therefore, I would be dismayed at His presence;  
When I consider, I am terrified of Him.

16 “It is God who has made my heart faint,  
And the Almighty who has dismayed me,  
17 But I am not silenced by the darkness,  
Nor deep gloom which covers me.

Regardless, “Prayer has the power to conquer, move and persuade God. We overcome God when we yield to God. When we are *vanquished*, we are victors. When the life of nature is broken within us, then from conscious weakness springs the longing which God cannot but satisfy. . . . ‘Abide with me.’ is music to his ears.” (Maclaren, p.228) This harmonizes with **“I will not let thee go, except Thou bless me.”** (Gen. 32:26)

This brings us to the new name. **“What is your name?” He said, “Jacob.” “Your name will no longer be called Jacob, but Israel for you have struggled with God and with men and have prevailed.** (vv. 27-28) This change is a sign of his transformed character—before this he was a wily man, a supplanter, duplicitous and an astute business man of the earth, earthy. But that wrestling ring, or site, which was actually ***the presence-chamber of God Almighty*** (this place may occur whenever and wheresoever God ordains it!), the craftiness in Jacob was mortally wounded. *Thus do people change!* I mean a wound unto the death of it. Instantly God was disclosed as his Friend and the front of antagonism was dropped and the fount of blessing was opened to him. **If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that says to you, ‘Give me a drink,’ you would have asked Him, and He would have given you living water.** (John 4:10) God became to him, the **one needful thing**—**this is the main shift in the narrative!** *Anyone who knows that, anyone who has learned that, even if imperfectly, has passed over in a purer, true, more spiritual realm—and now possess a former life, and can declare that his former crookedness (and guilt and shame) has been left behind and, more, that he has entered newness of life; he is a new creature, we say, in Christ.* For Jacob he is **a new man in God because God is newly his** . . . and that is a game changer. Jacob has a new love: a love of integrity. Now he wants to walk with God and that is his protective shield!

For God is truly with all who love integrity and walk with him.

*That new man is the one that Esau runs to and embraces—his true brother who has, at long last, come home.* I wonder if he heard the angels singing? Today Jacob became a man of integrity! A man after God’s own heart!

To impose a new name, a divine prerogative, is a sign of dominion and authority; it is a claim of ownership and manifests an insight into his *altered* character. Rather like the naming of the animals under Adam: **And whatever Adam called each living creature, that was its name.** (Ge. 2:19) Naming expressed his lordship over living creatures. The new man implies a new epoch in Jacob’s life. And it is so. His victory with God insured his power over his fellowman. (That also is who Esau ***perceives*** at their reunion—a powerful, invincible and unassailable man of God who not even four hundred men are enough to overthrow!)

“All men are servants of the man who is the servant and friend of God.” (Maclaren, p.229) This conversion signifies a charter, and a duty and it carries an implication that every true Christian is also an “Israel.” Someone whose deepened desire to know God is answered and continues to deepen throughout one’s entire life. . . with ever growing clarity.

Now all of this is recorded in the scriptures for our sakes **for our instruction** and we should consider how much more blessed we are, compared to Jacob. We have deeper insight and understanding *because of our fuller revelation*. The mercy extended to Jacob is multiplied to us—we have Jacob’s providences, plus those of his forefathers, to add to our own. This is great gain—abundant and certain knowledge of God—way beyond the paltry means of Jacob. The scriptures are hundreds of years away, the other side of their

bondage in Egypt! And Christ is millennia away! All we need is a loving eye to take it all in. And when this history of deliverance is repeated in our hearts, we can testify to our divine adversary (who opposed us in our flesh and in our sin) who came to be our friend.

So, are you walking as if your God has all the power?  
And are you walking in the truth that justice has been served?  
Are you anticipating Christ's return to complete that victory of justice?  
Are you walking in the freedom of the acquitted as one pardoned?  
Are you facing this life as one who has secured eternal life by faith?  
Do you count yourself as one redeemed, saved . . . a saint?  
Would your family, friends and neighbors declare you to be a Christian?  
If not, why not? Let what you know to be true determine what you say and do.

**Amen**