

1) Another odd parable from Jesus, the Short Storyteller.

A few weeks back, you may remember, he puzzled us
with a tale about a Dishonest Business Manager.

Today we get another mind-bender—this one about an Unjust Judge,
and a widow who begs, pleads, nags, and bangs on his door.

Finally the judge gives in, blurting out: *Alright, already!*

If I don't give her what she wants, she'll give me a black eye.

(That's the literal Greek translation of: *She may wear me out.*)

See that obnoxious widow who just won't quit? Jesus asks. Pray like her!

God won't BE like that Unjust Judge—God will grant justice "quickly."

The only question—with which Jesus concludes—is a RHETORICAL question:

When God COMES, will God find faith on earth?

To which, with all due respect, I pose a more straightforward question:

Faith on earth?—WHAT is THAT? WHAT "ON EARTH" is FAITH?

2) Three lessons from Scripture, all appointed for today, offer not a definition, but a vision.

Not a series of freeze-frame pictures but vivid action shots.

Because FAITH is not a NOUN; FAITH is a VERB.

Faith is actions we DO (or DON'T do). Leaps we take or fail to take.

Leaps we execute tentatively or wholeheartedly, boldly or quaking in fear,

Actions we embody with skeptical reticence or deeply grounded confidence,

Acts we undertake all at once or inch by inch—

sometimes bouncing back and forth along a line between "faith-ing" it or not.

When God shows up, will God find our faith EARTHED?

EARTHED by doing WHAT—doing it HOW?

The action shots we track in Scripture today suggest that

what God will find us doing, if we are FAITHING, is not just LEAPING, but WRESTLING—

Wrestling tenaciously, like the widow does with the unjust judge.

Wrestling trustingly, like Paul urges Timothy to do.

Wrestling with what's true about who we are, as Jacob does at Jabbok Brook.

3) For the widow, whatever her issue may be, the stakes are high—worth fighting for.

But the odds against her are high as well—this judge, who should care, couldn't care less.

If the woman has, in fact a case, she has no recourse but to keep on pushing—

pushing her petition in his face—again and again and again.

Faith in God does, in fact, ultimately depends on God's gracious gift; but it's no free ride.

So, says Jesus, *we need to pray always—tenaciously—and not lose heart.*

It's not the case, as with the uncaring judge, that *only the squeaky wheel gets the grease*.

Rather, faith has to do with our being continually fine-tuned, in prayer after prayer,
from WHAT WE REALLY WANT to WHAT IS TRULY RIGHT.

From *GIVE US A QUICK FIX, GOD* to *GIVE US WHAT CUTS TO THE QUICK—
GOES TO THE HEART—OF WHAT GOD, THE JUST JUDGE, WANTS—
NOT JUST FOR US, BUT FOR EVERYONE*.

In the story Jesus tells, it's the judge who takes a long time to pay attention.

The persistent prayer wrestling Jesus enjoins for us has to do with our learning, over time,
to pay closer and closer attention to who we are,
and how we can best open ourselves to the grace God wants to give us.

SO—Our Leaps of Faith at Redeemer will show themselves in patient persistent prayer.
Because faith is a tenacious wrestling act.

4) But tenacity all by itself has little value.

All that gritted teeth alone gets us is very tired jaws.

Wrestling in faith isn't just a tenacious wrestle; it's also a wrestle in trust.

Paul, whose done his share of faith wrestling, tries both to calm and to energize Timothy,
a young man who's discouraged, fearful, and unsure of himself.

Paul can't do trusting FOR Timothy, but Paul tries his best to stir up trust IN Timothy,
as Timothy struggles to find his own voice as a missionary teacher.

Continue in what you have learned and firmly believed!

Paul calls out from the sidelines of Timothy's Wrestling Match.

*You're not alone, Paul reminds him—remember your mother and grandmother
the ones who taught you the saving love of God.*

The sacred scriptures you learned as a kid—draw on them—they have your back!

Share what you have come to know.

Don't get distracted about how well the message might play, or what it may cost you.

Stay focused—breath deep—wrestle well.

To us at Redeemer—Paul has a word:

Keep on trying—Keep on trusting—Keep on wrestling—Take yet another leap of faith.

5) Faith is a wrestle in tenacity; faith is a wrestle in trust—

but faith is a wrestle with the truth as well—

a protracted wrestle in which we come to terms with the truth about who we really are.

For all his life, Jacob has been a cheat.

He has cheated his older brother Esau out of his birthright as his father Isaac's eldest son.

He has cheated Esau out of his father's deathbed blessing.

Running for his life from his understandably angry brother, Jacob has, with striking success,
managed to wheel and deal his way through life, getting rich at the expense of others.

God has, to all appearances, grace-greased Jacob's journey.

But now, it seems, the chickens have come home to roost.

Esau is hard on Jacob's heels in hot pursuit—

Esau has caught up with and is bearing down on Jacob, and there is no escape.

You can't cheat your way out of a pitched battle—

especially if your only weapons are your wives and children, flocks and herds.

Backed into a corner at Jabbok Brook—backed into a corner at last by Esau—and by God,

Jacob is forced to wrestle for his life as he wrestles with God, and wrestles with himself.

God will not let him go. He will not let God go.

So much falsehood and deceit need to be wrestled OUT of Jacob.

So much truth about who he is and who he should be—all that needs to be wrestled INTO him.

God and Jacob, they wrestle with each other all night long.

God doesn't pin down Jacob, God lets Jacob's tenacious persistence PREVAIL. (Imagine that!)

As a reminder of how Jacob has hobbled others, however, God leaves Jacob with a limp.

And yet, in this self-examination wrestling match;

God blesses Jacob, and gives him a new name: Israel—one who wrestles with God.

And that blessing breaks out on Jacob, when, upon leaving the wrestling ring;

Jacob takes a leap of faith and raises a white flag before the oncoming army of Esau.

And Esau and Jacob fall into each other's arms, weeping in reconciliation.

All because God lets—no demands—that Jacob wrestle with God—

wrestle until Jacob can come to terms with himself, and with who God is calling him to be.

And I can't help but wonder, as we at Redeemer take yet another in a long line of leaps in faith,

I wonder how God will corner us—and wrestle us into deeper dimensions of tenacious trust,

as we wrestle with God about who we have been,

who we have not been and could have been,

and who, by the wrestling grace of God, we might, as a faithful community, yet become.

So, once more, the question from Storyteller Jesus:

When God comes to Redeemer—as God quickly will—

will God find OUR faith —LEAPING—WRESTLING—will God find our faith EARTHED?