

Sunday 2nd August 2020

This short act of worship has been prepared for you to use if you are unable to attend church. If you are well enough why not spend a few moments with God, knowing that other people are sharing this act of worship with you

Opening Prayer

Calm me, Lord, as you calmed the storm;
still me, Lord, keep me from harm.
Let all the tumult within me cease;
enfold me, Lord in your peace.

David Adam (1936-2020)

Reproduced from Singing the Faith 624

Hymn: Help us O Lord to learn StF 501

Let us pray together

God of our going out and our coming home,
I worship you today.

For the times and places that have filled me
with joy, I praise you.

Where I have chosen the wrong path and
caused pain to myself, to you and to others,
I ask your forgiveness.

For the assurance that you will walk beside me
to forgive me and restore me, I thank you.

Today's Old Testament reading

Genesis 32:22-31

Time to Reflect An enduring cliché from the world of movies is the portrayal of the happy ending in spaghetti-western movies, with the hero walking off into the sunset satisfied that order has been restored and everyone can now live in peace and harmony.

This was brilliantly parodied by John Sullivan in the *Only Fools and Horses* Christmas Special (1996) when the Trotters finally become millionaires: the episode ends with Del-Boy, Rodney and Uncle Albert walking off into the horizon as the sun sets. At the time, it was thought that this would be the final episode of the long-running and popular comedy, but as it turned out, the show not only returned, but so did the characters' troubles. Their moment in the sun had turned out to be temporary and Sullivan captured the experience of many of us, that there are rarely easy answers to life's struggles.

Today's Old Testament reading ends, not with Jacob walking towards the sunset but towards the rising sun. It is not the story of a hard day's work successfully completed, but of a night-time of wrestling that resolves some questions but leaves others still open. His opponent refuses to offer him easy answers so whilst there is blessing for Jacob, things are not neatly tied up.

Jacob, plans to spend the night alone preparing for his uncomfortable reunion with his brother, Esau. Given their history, we might expect that he was always going to have a disturbed night. Choices from long ago are still having an impact on his life and his family's. After years of ducking and diving, Jacob seems to have come close to the end of his own resourcefulness but there is still something that wants to turn events to his advantage.

Into this scene walks the unexpected stranger. Later Jacob understands that he had been joined by God as he struggled with his past. What follows shows us that Jacob is not entirely ready to give up the fight and his mysterious opponent, seeing that Jacob is willing to fight to the end, delivers a decisive blow. It is at this point of vulnerability that Jacob opens up to a moment of unvarnished self-awareness and unexpected God-awareness.

Jacob demands a neat and tidy resolution which his companion refuses to give to him. Instead, from the struggle, Jacob is offered the opportunity of a new beginning. A new name, a new blessing (a blessing of his own and not one stolen from Esau) and a new insight to God's presence and God's nature of love.

So, for Jacob, there, with the rising sun, comes hope to follow a night of uncertain and painful struggle. But there is challenge too: he must reconcile himself to the fact that some of the

scars and wounds of a lifetime of wrestling will travel with him into the new day. God has confronted him with his past and offered him a better future, but his history will not be rewritten. He is offered a future shaped by God's faithful provision (rather than his own manipulative gains) and reconciliation (rather than the uncertainty of unresolved conflict). He will limp towards the future less certain of his own strength and more aware of God's presence.

The fantasy of walking off into the sunset is appealing because we would all like neat endings. Sometimes though, God challenges us to embrace new beginnings whilst carrying the memory of our tangled past. Facing up to our past in order to be ready for God's future may involve some painful wrestling with uncomfortable truths, but in the struggle we can find God's presence and God's blessing. Our story, God's story has not ended yet. May you see God's face and live.

Take a time to sit quietly

A time of prayer

Ever-present God, I join my prayer with all those who pray in the name of Jesus today:

We pray for your church that you grant us patience as we continue to the work we need to do to prepare for future gatherings together.

For those who are anxious about the future and those who see only threat in the days to come.

For those who are estranged from loved ones and feel they are unable to do anything to bring about reconciliation.

For those who wrestle in the night with trouble and distress of body, mind and soul.

I pray especially for ...

Holy God, help us to show others that you are present in the midst of their struggles, that together we might demonstrate your great love and concern for your world.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father

Sit quietly or sing a verse of a hymn that comes to mind

A prayer of blessing

Power of God, be our protection;
wisdom of God, be our guide;
word of God, be our inspiration;
shield of God, be our defence;
hosts of God, be our deliverance;
Son of God be our salvation;
now and always. Amen

*St Patrick's Breastplate,
Book of Armagh (9th Century)*

Original Materials by Revd Dalwyn R Attwell