

STRUGGLE IS AS STRUGGLE DOES

(Genesis 32:22-31; Luke 18:1-8)

The 1994 Best Picture of the Year movie *Forrest Gump* made the phrase “stupid is as stupid does” just a little bit popular.

The website called The Urban Dictionary says that the phrase “stupid is as stupid does” means “*that an intelligent person who does stupid things is still stupid*”. The website called Wiktionary says the phrase means that “*a person’s intelligence may be judged by the wisdom of his or her actions.*”

Either way that leaves us all in bad shape, because no matter how wise or intelligent we are—real or imagined—we have all done stupid things! I don’t believe that makes us all *stupid*. I only believe that makes us all *human*.

Forrest Gump would probably agree with me on that!

I’m going to cut to the chase and identify something else that I believe makes us all human, and that is *struggle*. The website Dictionary.com

says that to struggle means “*to contend with an adversary or an opposing force; to contend resolutely with a task or a problem or a difficulty; to advance violently (as in ‘to struggle through the snow’)*”—which most of us will be doing soon enough!

By those definitions, I believe that struggle is a part of the human experience—from the moment we struggle to take our first breath, to the moment we struggle to take our last.

Some people don’t like to let you know that they struggle; but if they are human they struggle with something. It doesn’t have to be something debilitating, chronic, progressive, disabling, earth-shattering, catastrophic, or disruptive. But it can be. Or it has been. Or it will be. Because that is part of the way that struggle rolls . . .

And struggle is as struggle does.

Some people who DO admit to their struggles like to pretend that their struggles don’t get them down. But my guess is that sometimes their struggles DO get them down. It may be for just a moment, or an hour,

or a day, or a time and a season—or any amount of time in between or beyond. And it may seem to them to be *nothing* compared to others they know who visibly struggle with what they consider to be serious issues in some shape, form or fashion. But sometimes, I believe their own struggles DO get them down. Because they are human, and our struggles are a part of our human existence, and that’s what struggles do.

Because struggle is as struggle does.

There are even some people who will try to convince you that they don’t *have* any struggles. That there is no task or problem or difficulty that they have to resolutely contend with; no adversary or opposing force that they have to do battle with; nothing in their lives that they have to “advance violently through...”

To them I would say “CONGRATULATIONS!” And then I would share with them something I learned from hanging around some wise church

folk: I learned that *everybody is either in the midst of a storm, on their way out of a storm, or on their way into a storm!*

So, if you're not struggling now, that's GREAT! But just keep on living...

Because struggle is as struggle does.

II.

This morning, in our scripture lessons from Genesis and Luke, we have two different stories of two different people who are in the midst of two different struggles—but struggles nevertheless.

✚ In Genesis we have Jacob in the midst of struggling with his fear and uncertainty of seeing his older brother Esau again after Jacob tricked him out of his birthright and left town—for a long time! Now Jacob is being led back home after getting rich and prosperous living alongside his Uncle Laban; and on the way home Jacob confesses to God in prayer that he is afraid that his brother Esau might kill him and his family, and asks for God's protection. As if his fear of he and his family getting killed by Esau wasn't

enough of an emotional struggle for Jacob, after sending his family and everything he owned ahead of him, he is encountered by an ominous, unnamed opponent who begins wrestling with him. So, what does Jacob do? *He wrestles him right back! And they go at it all night long!*

Now THERE'S a struggle for you!

And struggle is as struggle does—in this case because *we all get our own!* And—like Jacob—*nobody gets just one!*

✚ The widow in the parable that Jesus tells in Luke's gospel today has a struggle of a little different nature. She is struggling with a judge who won't hear her case and give her justice. She kept coming to him, and coming to him, and asking for justice and for her case to be heard again and again. And the judge—who had the power to continue to victimize this widow, the picture of helplessness in that time and culture—kept refusing to give her justice, because according to the parable, *"he neither feared God*

nor had respect for people.” So, what did the woman do? She kept on struggling with the judge, and asking him for justice.

Similar to Jacob, the woman had a “wrestling match” with the judge, all through the proverbial night!

Now THERE’S a struggle for you!

And struggle is as struggle does—in this case because *sometimes our struggles have a power dynamic to them that puts us at a real and definite disadvantage; to the point that some would look at the situation and say there is not a snowball’s chance in hell that under the present circumstances, that particular struggle can be overcome.*

III.

For both Jacob and the woman in the parable, these struggles they are going through are no small thing. In fact, the struggles they are in the midst of could literally make the difference between life and death for them!

That is indeed the nature of some of our struggles.

Like Jacob, some of our struggles can take us deep inside our fears and our uncertainties, whether we have spoken of them or not. Some of our struggles can take us to dark places within us, and we can feel surrounded by that darkness until we almost literally can't see our hand in front of our face, because the darkness of that dark space is too dark for us to see.

Like Jacob, we can find ourselves in our struggles wrestling with our very souls, and our most stubborn demons, and even our most sure salvation.

Like Jacob, we can find ourselves wrestling with our struggles proverbially all night long; and when the dawn comes, not finding that we have stumbled upon the light, but instead finding that we have stumbled upon a limp.

That just seems to be the nature of struggle...

Because struggle is as struggle does.

Like the woman in the parable, some of our struggles can pit us against systems that are designed to frustrate, and to deny, and to discriminate, and to discourage.

Like the woman in the parable, some of our struggles can keep us on our knees, imploring all of the powers that be for a judgement in our favor.

Like the woman in the parable, some of our struggles can test our hope, our faith, our patience, and our resolve—and can make us call on the name of the Lord.

That just seems to be the nature of struggle...

Because struggle is as struggle does.

IV.

But I want to point out something about both Jacob and the woman in the parable this morning:

In the midst of their deepest struggle, they didn't give up!

When it seemed like it all might turn against them, they didn't give in!

When it came down to holding on, and seeing their struggle through to the end, they didn't give out!

And in the end, both of them got blessed!

Jacob got blessed with a new name that signified his struggle, and a new limp that would forever remind him that God had been right there in the midst of his struggle!

The woman in the parable got blessed with a reverse decision and justice, vindication for her persistence and her patience, and in her prayer life, got blessed by waiting on the Lord!

It just goes to show you, that even in the midst of our deepest, darkest, most seemingly insurmountable struggles, God is right there with us; never leaving us or forsaking us; orchestrating some scenarios in the midst of our struggles that we could never dream of or imagine!

So no matter what you are going through, hold on to God's unchanging hand.

It's the hand of the God who loves us, who wants the best for us, who can rescue us, and struggle with us, and wait with us,

It's the hand of the God who can heal us, forgive us, renew us, and restore us.

It's the hand of the God whose kingdom Jesus preached about: a kingdom that does battle with some of the struggle-causing demons in our lives, and defeats their power.

It's the hand of the God who Jesus reached for as he went through his own struggles—all the way to the death he struggled on the cross.

It's the hand of the God who raised Jesus up from the struggle of death, and replaced that struggle with a resurrected life.

Hold on to the hand that can guide us through our struggles.

Because struggle is as struggle does—

But God is stronger than struggle.

Amen.

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