

## Trinity 10, 2021 Beautiful Scars

Genesis 32:22-31 / 2 Corinthians 4:7-18

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By Fr. Bill Baker (Guest Preacher)

You have heard it said that the rain falls on the just and the unjust, the righteous and the sinner alike. What are your thoughts concerning the adversities experienced in this life; the minor rain that falls in the form of catching a cold to the extreme monsoon of losing a child? Is there no meaning to the falling rain, no purpose...no reconciliation for such unaccountable suffering? You have also heard it said that life is not fair; I try to do the right thing, I look after the welfare of others; why did my house burn down? Do you feel that the righteous should not be subjected to the ill effects of a sinful world? Are you happy when an ill-tempered neighbor suffers loss? Is life unfair? I want you to consider for a moment that life is fair and that the rains of misfortune come with purpose in their sprinkling and at times in their downpour to reveal opportunities that can be squandered to our impairment or be sourced and gleaned from to produce what I want to call 'beautiful scars.'

Here once again the words of our Old Testament reading:

*"And he rose up that night, and took his two wives, and his two women servants, and his eleven sons, and passed over the ford Jabbok. And he took them, and sent them over the brook, and sent over that he had. And Jacob was left alone; and there wrestled a man with him until the breaking of the day. And when he (the man) saw that he prevailed not against him, he touched the hollow of his thigh; and the hollow of Jacob's thigh was out of joint, as he wrestled with him. And he said, Let me go, for the day breaketh. And Jacob said, I will not let thee go, except thou bless me" (Gen. 32:22-26).*

*"Except thou bless me."* Such determination for a man with so much on his plate. To start with he has two wives...and he has eleven sons. It doesn't take much imagination to conclude that Gregg using Marsha's hairbrush isn't going to go over without a lot of drama (Brady Bunch reference...sorry). Not unlike us, Jacob has a lot of responsibility requiring daily choices and decisions and I am confident he also experienced times of great loss and grief. Life has pressure, anxiety,

burden, tension and stresses that we all must learn to deal with or we risk falling into ills of depression. A sinful world allows a heaviness that could crush us if we fall on the wrong side of our Lord and Savior's grace and mercy. It is after Jacob sends his family and his belongings across the river that he finds himself alone with his thoughts and able to meditate on his new direction in life. And in this private moment Jacob finds himself wrestling with the Lord Himself.

Meditation and prayer can sometimes 'feel' like a wrestling match. Struggles come often and making the right decisions in line with our Lord's will can be a challenge no doubt. It is the voice of God; the Father's spirit touching our own where we use our free will to either deny His holy influence and increase our burdens or choose to listen to that still small voice of the Holy Spirit and bear instead the scars of reconciliation. At Jacob's encounter he is left with a permanent scar, a damaged hip, a change in direction that will be a reminder for his remaining days that he is a child of God first, above all things. And more scars will come. Sanctification is the process of God's spirit working on our own ...maturing our righteousness and bringing us closer to our Father in Heaven. Jacob passed this test. The correction of the Lord focused Jacob on the importance of living life in communion with God regardless of the discomfort or grief that may lay along our journeys; loss of a loved one, the failure of ones livelihood, the fear of things unknown. Jacob stills has to cross the river where the struggles remain, but the Lord has shown Jacob that the pains of life can lead to blessing as long as the heart is right.

*"And Jacob called the name of the place Peniel for I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved"* (Gen. 32:30). Fighting against the tragic events of life is to wrestle with God because we are sinners seeking forgiveness in a sinful world. Wrestling with God will leave scars, but these scars are the marks of healed wounds...wounds healed by the love of our Father through His grace and mercy in Jesus Christ. Scars...beautiful reminders of lives turned to Christ being set on the path of eternal joy.

Our reading from Paul's second letter to the Corinthians backs this up: *"We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed."* Storms come to every life but it is the power of our resolution to seek God in every situation that sets us apart as lights of Christ. The scars that are left behind are reminders of

the deep incisions on our souls that testify to Godly lives lived in the reality of a sinful world.

You can use your pain to feel sorry for yourself, to make excuses for failed growth, and you can lash out at others and destroy relationships, but these open wounds will never heal into the beautiful scars they can be until you allow the love of God to heal your soul, a love that wants to make you new every day. The time to get your relationship right with Christ is now! The adversary will still attack and wound but the way you recover will make all the difference in your witness...and witnesses are what we are called to be! With the right attitude, with heavenly focus, the trials we experience can have beautiful outcomes and be seen in a new and transformative light. If you were silent...now you can find confidence in your voice! If you lacked understanding...now you can reach out in compassion! If you were greedy...now you can feel the freedom of heartfelt giving.

Each lash our Lord Jesus received converted our sufferings into forgiveness and blessing. Our scars give us eyes to see and ears to hear the truth the spirit is relaying to us so that we might be true lights for the Gospel of Christ. It is for the purging of the soul that we suffer: *“For all things are for your sakes, (Paul says) that the abundant grace might through the thanksgiving of many redound to the glory of God. For which cause we faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day.”* The journey of life is full of bumps and snags of various magnitudes. I like to refer to them as opportunities to sacrifice, exposing God’s love to the world...love being the willingness to sacrifice for the needs and the wellbeing of others. Love gives us the ability to see our own tragedies in the brighter light of God’s message to those we touch.

*“For our light affliction,(Paul says) which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal.”* Despite all his hardships, despite all the scars he has endured, Paul sees his adversities, his sufferings as “light afflictions” because they pale to the everlasting glory that awaits us all on the other side of this life.

Through repentance, faith and baptism we overcome the darkness and come humbly into the light where we grow spiritually and mature gracefully into the

proper children of God we are imaged to be. And it is our ongoing commitment to repentance, faith and Communion that will preserve us unto righteousness. In Christ we are not promised trouble-free lives but we are assured and promised an eternal victory. This is what St. Paul refers to as *"treasures in earthen vessels"* the light of Gods glory in Christ, shining through our scars, exposing not ourselves but the power of God.

Like Christ our scars will remain. They are present reminders and eternal testaments to our faith. Through baptism and communion, we come to Christ and we continue along our journeys together as lights to those who continue to suffer alone. And how did we overcome? What is it that we can share to make the difference and fill the void in so many lives?...Love. Let us remember that LOVE came down...*"For God so loved the world that He gave his only begotten Son to the end that all that believe in Him should not perish but, have everlasting life"* (John 3:16). And that is the message. We too must suffer and overcome by the love of God through Christ and let that same love flow through us to pull others out of their perilous paths. And don't expect that your life will get easier, that the rocks of life will become softer. We may be new creatures in Christ but in the words of Martin Luther, *"I tried to drown the old Adam in the waters of baptism, but I discovered the miserable wretch can swim."*

And so, the fight continues. When you are left alone take the time to wrestle with God being not willing to let go until you have gleaned a blessing, use your prayer time to be renewed each day and night, *"Knowing that He which raised up the Lord Jesus shall raise us also..."* Your scars are a testament to God's love working in your life. Your scars are beautiful.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen...