

October 21, 2007  
Genesis 32:22-32

I used to play Little League baseball when I was younger. (Yeah, I still have a lot of baseball fever right now!) I used to love playing Little League baseball! It was a blast! The thrill of getting on base after a base hit! The thrill of catching a fly ball! The thrill of... picking dandelions in left field!

I remember one game in particular when I was about eight years old. We were down by one run in the final inning. The bases were loaded and there were two outs. And it was my turn to step up to the plate. The weight of the entire game fell onto my shoulders. Bases loaded. Two outs. Down by a run. It's what every eight year old boy dreams about. It's what every twenty-eight year old man dreams about. I remember stepping up to the plate and having great visions of hitting a grand slam homerun. At the very least, I was all set to hit a double and knock in the winning run that way. That's the way it was supposed to work. The first pitch went by me. Apparently it was a strike. The second pitch went by me. Apparently that was a strike, too. So then, I knew that this third pitch was the moment. This was when I was going to get my game-winning grand slam homerun. The third time's the charm. The third pitch came and I swung as hard as I could. And I made contact! I looked up to the sky to see where the ball was going to land. But, I couldn't see it. I couldn't find it. And then, I was shocked to look down and to see the ball dribbling about three feet in front of me. Before I even knew what had happened, the catcher picked up the ball and tagged me out. The game was over. We had lost.

Losing isn't much fun. But it's definitely a part of life. We win some. We lose some. This reading from Genesis is an absolutely surprising text, all centered around losing. Jacob wrestles with God-in-the-flesh in this text. It's fascinating! It's all about losing.

Here's the scoop in our reading from Genesis. Jacob is traveling with his whole family. And as they're traveling, they come to a river in the middle of the night called the Jabbok. Jacob tells his whole family to cross on over to the other side of the river. But for some reason, Jacob decides not to cross the river. Our text doesn't tell us why he doesn't cross the river. We don't know. Maybe he was just tired or something. In the middle of the night though, a man comes along and begins wrestling with Jacob. Jacob and this other man are wrestling right along the river... which means they're, you know, mud-wrestling pretty much. And soon Jacob discovers that it's God himself, God-in-the-flesh, who he's wrestling. We're not sure how he figures that out either. But this man admits that he is, in fact, God-in-the-flesh. God and Jacob are mud-wrestling. Wow!

Now, who do you think wins this mud-wrestling match? This should be a no-brainer, right? God should, by all means, win the wrestling match, hands down. I mean, he's God. Come on. Brace yourself – God loses. Jacob wins. What?! How can that be? What's up with that?!

Well, let's stand back for a second. We know that Jesus is of course God-in-the-flesh, Christ himself. And we know that Christ loses, too. He loses something much more valuable than a silly mud-wrestling match. He loses his life for us on the cross. He loses *for us*. God-in-the-flesh in this text from Genesis loses *for us*, too. He loses *for* Jacob.

And why does he lose for Jacob in this reading? Well, losing for Jacob simply shows God's willingness to be vulnerable. And that vulnerability shows an act of love on God's part. Christ losing his life for us is certainly a huge act of love for us. Losing a wrestling match, a mud-wrestling match nonetheless, pales in comparison. But it still shows God's willingness to be vulnerable to Jacob. It shows love. Little love is shown if God wins the wrestling match. What's God going to say after winning the wrestling match? "Ha, ha! I beat you!" He's God. He's supposed to be able to win. Come on. God isn't condescending, though. He's meek and humble. God shows Jacob that he is meek and humble. God doesn't overpower Jacob with strength. He doesn't show brute force against Jacob. He shows Jacob that he is vulnerable. God shows Jacob that he knows what it is to lose.

Wrestling with Jacob shows vulnerability. It shows love. And it shows that God just likes to have fun sometimes, too. Faith is a wrestling match. But it takes two to wrestle. Jacob could have called it quits here. He could have said, "There's no way I'm going to wrestle with God. There's no way I can win this." But he doesn't call it quits. He keeps on wrestling – wrestling until daybreak. He digs in and wrestles with God for hours. What do you think about wrestling with God? If we wrestle with God, that shows we are willing to be vulnerable with God, too. And that vulnerability on our part lets God know we love him, too. It shows that we are willing to get muddy with him and we are willing to have fun with him, too.

We could just keep our distance away from him, choosing not to wrestle with him. We could just play it safe and watch others wrestle and wrestle with him. What does that show God, though? That shows complacency in our faith. If we're not wrestling with God, we are the ones who do lose, then. We lose if we're complacent. We lose out on having fun with God, wrestling with Him, mud-wrestling nonetheless. We lose out on experiencing his love in our lives, a love that is vulnerable and open enough to come and wrestle with us. We lose out on so much joy that comes from having fun with God, mud-wrestling with God, playing like Little Leaguers with God. God isn't going to overpower us into wrestling with him, though. He's not going to show brute force against us. God's meek and humble.

One of the most important things we do as a church is to offer opportunities for people to come and to wrestle with God. Our mission as a church is to wrestle with God and to provide opportunities for people to come and wrestle with God. Our mission is not to win, win, win. Christ has already won it all. Everything has already been won for us in Christ. He's defeated death and evil on the cross and in his resurrection. Our mission as a church is to wrestle with him. Nobody can make you wrestle with God, though. That weight falls on your shoulders. That's your call. The only way we lose is if we decide to go nowhere near God. We lose because we become complacent... which means we will atrophy and we will grow weak – weak in our faith, weak in our love, weak in our joy. We can never afford to do that as a church. Never. Come and wrestle with God. Be a part of the mission of our church, the ministry that happens here. God loves it when we dig in and start wrestling with Him. The weight of the entire game does not fall onto any one of us. That weight falls onto Christ's shoulders... and he's already won. He's won it all by defeating death and evil on the cross and in his resurrection. Come and wrestle. You'll love it. God loves it. Let's get muddy with God! Amen.