

Two nice, inspiring stories about perseverance in prayer

Wrestling with God; “I will not let you go, unless you bless me.” The woman convinces the unjust judge. So, if we wrestle enough with God, we will get our requests. Right? No.

It doesn't work that way. It can't. The unhealed leukemia. The innocent prisoner whose appeal gets rejected. The civilian in Ukraine whose family prayed for her and yet who still ended up the victim of a random invader's bullet.

Prayer-of-Jabez spirituality; prosperity gospel

We need to look deeper into these stories. Neither of them tells a neat-and-clean version of reality. All the players are changed by their encounters.

The woman gets her request and is raised up in status. The judge actually grants justice and acts, at least for once, as a good judge—his integrity is increased. Clearly he's not the God character in this story—Jesus says “How much more.”

Jacob limps after “prevailing”

There is mystery, eeriness, unresolvedness in the encounter with the nameless man who really is somehow God.

Given a new name, Israel, “one who wrestles with God,” surely the most wonderful name that could be given to a people, God's chosen people who have wrestled with God through the centuries and continue to this day.

Later today we'll be meeting for our third of three Imagine Incarnation conversations about our campus; the process of group decision-making. Not always linear and smooth; actually important decisions almost never are. The Groan Zone. There is no shortcut; “the only way out is through.” That's true of human decision-making and true of our lives; the process of discernment; the process of building a relationship; the process of grieving a loss; the process of growing into the self we are created to be.

God works through messiness, through history; else why create a world at all? God could have snapped his, her, and their divine fingers and zoomed straight to the end of the story, to the holy city in the book of Revelation. But that wouldn't have been a real world.

Jesus could have snapped his fully human and fully divine fingers and zoomed straight to Easter without Good Friday. But then he wouldn't have been truly one of us.

So we come together week by week to proclaim the mystery of a God who blesses us in our constant wrestlings. We bring our complex lives to this table, not to be simplified, but to be enriched and focused and made whole.