**Persistent Wrestling**

I thought that the theme of wrestling with God and persistence in our prayer life could best be conveyed through this story, which I will tell in the first person:

I would like to tell you my story of when I wrestled with God. You’ll have to forgive me though, because sometimes I wander in my thoughts and get stuck, kind of like those old record players when you had to bump the needle to get it going again. My name is T.J. I’ve been called T.J. for so many years, I sometimes forget what it stands for, and I have to look at my baptismal certificate to remember. I like looking at my baptismal certificate though because it reminds me of God’s love for me. But, speaking of memory, there are some things I’d rather not remember, things that I regret doing in my life. The thing that I regretted the most in my life happened with one of my brothers. We had a really big argument after dad died and I stormed off in anger, vowing never to speak to him or see him again. I went off, joined the army and made a life for myself, far away from that brother. Well, time went on, and I became busy in my career and raising my family. I had all the signs that I was happy and successful – a big house, nice cars, memberships in all the right clubs and groups and attended the right church. I told myself that my brother was the one who started the whole fight and he was the one to blame for what’s happened. It was just fine with me thinking that he wasn’t my brother, or so I tried to convince myself. My life seemed just fine without him, anyways.

One night, after I went to bed, I started dreaming; at least I think I was dreaming. It was one of those dreams that seem so real that you aren’t sure if you’re asleep and dreaming or if you’re dreaming when you’re awake. Anyway, I dreamed of my brother and suddenly I felt emotions that I thought I had gotten rid of through the years as well as other emotions. The biggest emotion I felt was guilt, guilt that I had done something to either start or prolong the argument. I also felt guilty for being so hard-hearted in not trying to patch things up with my brother. In my dream, I felt as if I was wrestling with my brother, with myself and with God. As I wrestled throughout the night, I prayed hard to God. No, actually, I was begging God that it wasn’t too late to make things right with my brother. I not only wrestled with this incident with my brother, but all those other times when I acted poorly or downright badly. While I was wrestling, it felt as if God was my opponent. I didn’t want to let go for fear of falling into a huge abyss and God didn’t want to let go and kept saying, “I love you, TJ.” Amazingly, I believe I heard God’s voice giving me peace and forgiveness for the wrongs I had committed and assuring me that it would work out okay with my brother.

When I got up the next morning, my bed was a mess. It looked as if I was actually wrestling with someone. Oh, how I miss my late wife at times like this. I would be able to talk with her and she had a way of putting it all in perspective. I do miss her. Anyways, after straightening the bed, I resolved that I wouldn’t do anything until I called my brother; I found his phone number through an internet search in a matter of seconds. As I picked up the phone, my hands got sweaty and I got a knot in my stomach. I must have picked up the phone and set it down at least a half dozen times. (A few more times and I would have invented a new exercise for seniors!) Finally, I pushed the buttons and placed the call. How I longed for those old rotary phones, they would have given me a few extra seconds as the dial “walked” back so the next number could be dialed. The phone started ringing immediately and my brother answered. Though his voice was a little shakier (I think that is a sign of when we’re getting old), it was still his distinctive voice. It took me a few seconds to return his “Hello,” but I eventually got talking with him. We talked for quite a while and I made plans to go home and visit him. Home – I hadn’t thought of the place where I grew up as home in a long time. It actually sounded rather good.

I wish I could tell you that the reunion went perfectly smoothly and that we’re best of buddies now, but I can’t, but we are rebuilding our relationship. Looking back at what I went through, I can better understand what Jacob went through that night he wrestled with God.

There had been times in my life where I thought God had forgotten about me, thinking I had to do everything on my own. But, as I look back on my life, I see where God always met me where I was, whether it was through someone else, or something I read or when I went to church, or even in my dream where I “wrestled” with God and myself. Sometimes, I ignored those signs of God’s presence or even turned my back to them. I thought I could do it all on my own. But the time came when I had to admit I couldn’t do it all on my own, that I longed for a connection with my family. Maybe my wrestling match with God was another way of God’s persistence at getting my attention, like the widow in Jesus’ parable of the widow and the unjust judge. It almost seemed as if   
God was the widow, hounding me to make things right with my brother. I am so glad that God never let me go while we were wrestling that night. I know that without God and my faith in Jesus, I would never have made that phone call on my own.

This little story was to illustrate that sometimes we may be the unjust judge in today’s parable and God may be persistent in urging us to do what is just from God’s perspective, not ours. Just as Jacob was in the dark places of his life, without anything to ‘hide’ behind, he still clung to the notion that God could help him, despite his urge to want to control God. Just as he had surrendered to God, so too are we urged to surrender to God and cling to God, even though we may continue to wrestle with God. So, as Jesus says, we should be persistent in our prayers to God – we just might find that we will want what God wants.

YouTube links:

Gospel and Sermon: <https://youtu.be/bdW4EBW-ODo>

Service: <https://youtu.be/tZfqowtS5cs>