

Proper 24C  
October 20, 2019  
Genesis 32:22-31, Luke 18:1-8

## **SILENCE IS NOT AN OPTION**

In the end, it was his hip that did him in. It was his hip that—jerked out of joint by that divine adversary—made him vulnerable, hastening the end of that midnight wrestling match.

And all I can say is, I understand.<sup>1</sup>

When you're used to walking around without pain. When you're accustomed to going where you want and doing what you want without restriction and then pain injects itself into your life, you start looking for a way out of your predicament.

**And maybe—depending on the source of that pain, that wound—you start to limp; or to walk with a cane; or your body gives off some other sign that all is not right within.**

From that night onward, Jacob bore a scar and a limp to go with it. And he also bore a new name: ISRAEL—WRESTLER WITH GOD. A name that came to belong not to him alone but to his people: **Israel, striver, contender, wrestler with God.**

**So what we get, in this story from Genesis is a mixture of biology and theology; etymology and psychology all rolled into one; all slugging it out in the muddy banks of the Jabbok River.**

**Of course, for Jacob, the wrestling began much earlier than that night.**

It began even before he was out of the womb he shared with his brother Esau!

Their pregnant mother Rebekah became so worn out by the churning battles taking place in her belly that she wondered if she would survive! And she went to the LORD about it, and the LORD told her:  
TWO NATIONS ARE CONTENDING IN YOUR WOMB.

TWO PEOPLES, WHO, BORN FROM YOU, WILL BE DIVIDED. (Gen 25:22)

Jacob, who wrestled with Esau in the womb, later wrestled his brother's birthright and blessing away through deceit and manipulation.

And now, after years away, years in which he acquired wives, raised children, and expanded herds—all the while getting basically what he wanted without any thought of Esau clouding his mind—Jacob is called home, and he must wrestle again with the thought that he will face his brother's wrath; must wrestle anew with the unavoidable truth that he is vulnerable.

So Jacob worries, he schemes, he plots, and he comes up with a plan to win his brother over—or, failing that, to at least survive the encounter. And that's how he ends up alone, at night, on the bank of the river, locked in an encounter that will forever leave its mark on him.

**Some wounds, some vulnerabilities, are more visible than others, but we each have them.**

Some of us carry them on the outside, and we come limping to worship. Others of us are perfectly fine on the outside while inside we're limping and hurting.

---

<sup>1</sup> I have had two hip surgeries in the past 10 months and have had to use crutches and canes during recovery, and until recently, have been walking with a limp. epk

**We each carry our woundedness in the form of baggage; and the longer we live the more complicated that baggage becomes...and heavy.**

**Robert Bly calls it “the long bag we drag behind us.”**

When we were 1 or 2 years old, he writes, we had a 360-degree personality with energy radiating out from all parts of our body and psyche. But one day we noticed that our parents didn't like certain parts of that ball. They said things like: “Can't you be still?” Or “It isn't nice to try and kill your brother.”

Behind us we have an invisible bag, and the parts of us our parents don't like, we...put in the bag. By the time we go to school our bag is quite large. Then our teachers have their say: “Good children don't get angry over such little things.” So we take our anger and put it in the bag.

We spend our life [up to age] twenty deciding what parts of our self to put into the bag, and we spend the rest of our lives trying to get them out again.<sup>2</sup>

**Bly's insight operates on a societal level as well. Whatever the dominant culture considers unworthy, unacceptable, or inferior goes into the bag.**

**2019 marks the 400th anniversary of the first slave ship that landed on these shores... Folks, black bodies are in that bag. Native bodies, too. Collective wounds that run deep.**

I'll never forget how, 33 years ago, my Karuk mentor described what it was like flying across country from her tribal home in Northwest California to her son's graduation from Dartmouth College in N. H.

Jeanerette, who had a spiritual gift for sensing the pain of others, described that coast-to-coast journey at 30,000 feet as a trail of tears; for all along the way, the cries of Native people and communities—living and dead—rose up from the ground to touch her.

**The woman in our parable—what was in the bag she carried?  
What was the burden from which she wanted relief?**

**As a rule, widows belonged in her culture's LONG BAG; but this woman—she's not about to accept that fate. And not accepting that fate means she has grown used to shouting; to raising her voice again and again because no one is listening and if she does not raise her voice she accepts invisibility.**

This widow reminds me of the MADRES DE PLAZA DE MAYO – MOTHERS OF THE PLAZA DE MAYO who when Argentina's military kidnapped and killed thousands of so called “subversives” in the late 70's, began to meet each Thursday in the large Plaza opposite the government building in Buenos Aires.

State censorship prevented any discussion of the “disappeared.” But that didn't deter these mothers from looking for answers about what had happened to their missing sons and husbands.

There on the Plaza de Mayo they walked and chanted every week in a non-violent demonstration.

**One of the women, María del Rosario de Cerruti, spoke of her commitment this way:**

“One of the things I simply will not do now is shut up. The women of my generation in Latin America have been taught that the man is always in charge and the woman is silent even in the

---

<sup>2</sup> Robert Bly. *The Long Bag We Drag Behind Us*, from *A Little Book on the Human Shadow*. pp.17-18

face of injustice...Now I know that we have to speak out about the injustices publicly. If not, we are accomplices. I am going to denounce them publicly without fear. This is what I learned.”<sup>3</sup>

**María and the widow of today’s parable are cut from the same cloth.**

Vulnerable in every way—socially, financially, physically—the widow has little ground to stand on. Approaching the corrupt judge with no one by her side and nothing in her purse to grease his palm, she pounds on his door over and over again demanding to be heard.<sup>4</sup>

**Contrast her with the judge—a male in a male-driven world; a man who wields power even though that power has no ethical foundation—and you get the picture:**

**She doesn’t have a snowball’s chance in “heck” of getting his attention on her case, much less deciding in her favor!**

**But, as the parables of Jesus reveal, things go topsy-turvy in the world of God’s reign.**

The rotten judge, worn down by the woman’s persistence, finally sticks his head out the window and shouts, **ENOUGH ALREADY! I’LL GET YOU WHATEVER YOU WANT IF YOU JUST SHUT UP!** And justice, at last, is done.

**Jesus must have gotten a lot of laughs with that parable...and a lot of sighs, too.**<sup>5</sup>

Over 7½ decades Peace has grown into a community that comes alongside others in times of their distress. The letters written today take their inspiration, we might say, from this woman who refused to take NO for an answer, who refused to be silent in the face of her personal story of injustice, who refused to keep things stuffed away in that long bag any longer.

**There’s a new movement gaining steam within the world church and within congregations across the ELCA these days. It’s called THURSDAYS IN BLACK—how many have heard of it?<sup>6</sup> This movement takes its cue from those brave MOTHERS OF THE PLAZA DE MAYO.**

**Its baseline is the acknowledgment that in every country around the globe women must wrestle with the tragic reality of gender-based violence; violence that scars, that leaves wounds that are passed on from one generation to the next.**

**This violence is frequently hidden, and its victims are often silent.**

**THURSDAYS IN BLACK says we all have a responsibility to speak out against violence, to ensure that women and men, girls and boys, are safe from rape and violence in homes, schools, work, and streets – in all places in our societies.**

**The invitation is simple but profound. Wear black on Thursdays. Wear a pin to declare you are part of the global movement that resists attitudes and practices that permit rape and violence.**

**Show your respect for women who, like the widow of our parable, are resilient in the face of injustice and violence. And encourage others to join you.**

<sup>3</sup>Information on the Madres de Plaza de Mayo is taken from the *Women in World History* website: <http://www.womeninworldhistory.com/contemporary-07.html>

<sup>4</sup> Kimberly Bracken Long, *Feasting on the Word, Year C Volume 4*. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010), 188.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> See the World Council of Churches: [https://www.oikoumene.org/en/get-involved/thursdays-in-black/activity\\_news](https://www.oikoumene.org/en/get-involved/thursdays-in-black/activity_news)

Oftentimes the color **black** in our racist and white supremacist society has been associated with **negative racial connotations**. But not in this campaign. In this campaign **Black** is a color of **resistance and resilience and solidarity**.<sup>7</sup>

Yet, by themselves these qualities are not enough—TRUST must be part of the equation, too! Jesus calls on us to **put our trust** in the God who is NOTHING LIKE the unjust judge; the God who willingly, eagerly even, participates in human suffering and vulnerability.

What scheming Jacob learned that night—and learned the hard way, was the **value of vulnerability** as an antidote to a **toxic masculinity**. And in case he might be tempted to **forget that lesson** God gave him a limp so that this truth would always be present with him.

Jesus, wrote Paul, emptied himself to experience the full range of human vulnerability in order to redeem it. He rode that train all the way to the cross. And his rising is God's forever YES! to Christ's way of being in the world.

The impulse to help others, to reach out to neighbors, to wrestle solutions from the complex problems that vex our world—that impulse is written in the DNA of our community—or should I say BNA—BE NOT AFRAID. It was there in the beginning, and it continues to be here.

**We are what Christ has called us to be—a servant community**. At the FONT we get our marching orders and at the TABLE we receive nourishment for whatever challenges lie ahead.

And God has given us each other as “little Christs” so that we will never be alone. What a precious gift that is! We are never alone. Thanks be to God.

Amen.

---

<sup>7</sup> See the Women of the ELCA website: <https://www.womenoftheelca.org/blog/post/black-is-the-color-of-resistance-resilience-and-solidarity>