

Saints, it is good to be with you today.

I know that I am no substitute for Bishop Howell, but I do hope you know how much her heart and prayers are with you. And I am glad that we have this opportunity to worship together.

As the Canon to the Ordinary, I'll be working with your Wardens and Vestry in the months ahead, as you prepare to call your next priest. Recently, I had the opportunity to meet with your Wardens, Cn. Wilco, and Bishop Howell. During this time together, your Wardens were gracious enough to show us Atonement's buildings and grounds.

As we made the tour, it was clear this body of Christ is dedicated and faithful. Both in your love for God, but also in your love for the local community. You are serving as Christ's hands and heart in this world, through your worship and food pantry, your gardens and playground, hosting recovery groups, and so much more.

Right now, our world is aching for the kind of unconditional, unstoppable love that God longs for this world to know. Thank you, for all the ways you are sharing God's love with a hungry world.

Yesterday y'all celebrated your ministry with Sandi. No matter how long a priest and parish are together, these goodbyes are ripe with the full spectrum of thoughts and feelings. Gratitude for all that was, love for one another, worry about all the uncertainties that accompany transitions, mixed in with threads of hope for where the Spirit may be calling you.

It is even a time of reconciliation - with God, with ourselves, and with one another. Because ultimately transitions are a season when we are especially intentional about tending what needs tending. This weekend is a potent moment for Atonement, as you look behind you, and before you.

The Spirit has been at work in the lectionary; in our reading from Genesis, Jacob is at a similar juncture. Jacob, the son of Isaac, and grandson of Abraham, is one of the key figures in the Hebrew Scriptures. Up until this moment, he was well known in his family for being a trickster. When his mother was pregnant she could feel her twins wrestling inside her, and at birth Jacob clung to Esau's heel as he exited the womb. As a boy, he tricked Esau into selling him his birthright for a bowl of soup,

As a young adult, he disguised his voice and appearance, and stole the blessing their father had planned for Esau. This resulted in Jacob needing to leave Canaan - to avoid being killed by his brother - and going to the land of Aram to live with his Uncle Laban.

While living abroad, let's just say Jacob's behavioral trends continued. Yet his uncle gave him a run for his money, tricking Jacob into marrying Leah before his beloved Rachel. (If you've never read these stories before, take this opportunity for some light summer reading - it's better than any Netflix drama).

Many years pass by, and Jacob now has two wives, two maids, eleven children, an abundance of sheep and other possessions. At God's urging, Jacob and his family begin the journey home to Canaan. It was a long journey to make by foot - roughly 500 miles. But the true distance Jacob needed to overcome, was the distance between himself and his brother. Returning home meant coming face to face with his brother Esau.

Jacob had no idea how his brother would receive him, or what the consequences for his youthful actions might be. To hedge his bets, he sends Esau a series of offerings ahead of him. Then he sends his family and possessions across the raging Jabbok River [JAB-uck]. Yet before we can reconcile with others, we must reconcile with ourselves and with God. And that is precisely what we see unfolding in today's text.

Jacob wrestled with a mystical figure all night long. The figure is first referred to as a man, and by the end of the text as God.

After a night of wrestling with God, it becomes clear that Jacob has triumphed, and is then struck on the hip. Leaving Jacob with a lifelong, physical reminder of this encounter. As the sun begins to appear on the horizon, they remain locked in a wrestling hold. When the mystical figure instructs Jacob to let him go, he refuses to do so until he is given a blessing.

This is when the mystical figure-is-really-God moment -is revealed, as Jacob is renamed Israel, *“for you have striven with God and with humans, and have prevailed.”*

Realizing who Jacob has been wrestling with, he pushes the figure for their name. Instead, the question is ignored, and God blesses Jacob-now-Israel.

With the match over, Jacob-now-Israel is forever changed. He has wrestled with God, reconciling with himself and God.

Now poised to genuinely reconcile
with his brother in the passage ahead.

And to ensure he'll never forget this moment,
God has left Jacob-now-Israel
with a new name and a limp.

To honor this divine encounter,
Jacob renames the place - Peniel [Peh-nee-el] -
“...for I have seen God face to face, and yet my life is preserved.”

This passage is a rich metaphor for our own relationship with God.

It begs us to reflect on:

- What actions do we need to take responsibility for?
- How might God be inviting us to reconcile with ourselves and with God?
- Where might we need to tend to other fractured relationships?

Jacob was a deeply faithful man, with an active relationship with God.

And yet, he was also human.

He made mistakes.

He sometimes puts his own ego and whims before others.

He got sidetracked.

Over the course of our lives, we are going to muck it up sometimes.

We will make mistakes, we will get in God's way, or go off the rails.

Yet the most important thing we can do -
whether we are on or off the rails -
is to show up to our relationship with God.

To be intentional about tending what needs tending.

I've always found the image of Jacob wrestling with God to be a comfort.

Throughout my life, I've often felt like I was wrestling with God.

Sometimes as an act of resistance, and others in persistence.

As a young person, I resisted a call to ordained ministry.

In my home parish I witnessed dysfunction
and what felt like a Gospel-amnesia.

After all, Jesus was pretty clear in his messaging.

Everyone was hyper concerned with what happened on the altar,
but wanted to ignore the changing neighborhood,
and the rising needs of our neighbors for support
with recovery, mental health, housing and food.

I felt God's call, and I also felt like my answer was a full stop no.

If being a priest meant being out of sync with Jesus's Gospel call
- thanks, but no thanks.

(You can see where that conversation eventually landed!)

Yet just as often, wrestling is persistence in prayer.

When I was asked to serve on the Search Committee
for our next bishop,
I knew I needed to double down in my prayer life.

I had to wrestle with what that meant,
and hold more space each day to be in prayer.

The last thing I wanted was to get in God's way,
and the only way I knew how to do that
was to show up more fully,
more consistently in my prayer life.

Not for the sake of saying prayers,
but for holding more space to listen,
to hold silence, to name prayers, and to give thanks.

To more intentionally tend to my relationship with God.

It was a humbling experience
to witness the faithfulness
of the people of our diocese and our deep love of Christ;
of the candidates that vulnerably put themselves forward in trust;
of all who supported the process from beginning to end;
and then to see, again and again,
how the Spirit moved through the process.

God is so incredibly good.

Whether we are wrestling with God
as we seek reconciliation, or
from a place of resistance or persistence,
like Jacob, we will always prevail.

We win the match simply by showing up and engaging.

God longs to be in an active relationship with us.

Because in relationship, we are reminded,
God's abiding, unstoppable, and loving presence is always with us.

We are reminded of the goodness of God's dream,
and with time, God's longing becomes our own longing.

As we sit with Jacob's divine encounter, and as we prepare to head back out into the world today, I would invite us to continue reflecting this week:

- What might God be calling this community to intentionally tend to during this season of transition?
- Where might we need to reconcile with ourselves, with God, with another?
- When have we wrestled with God, and if so, was it from a place of persistence or resistance?
- What reminders of God's abiding, unstoppable presence do we need to carry with us?

Amen.