

## Coming Out of the Shadows Genesis 32.22-32



**I** have been teaching on prayer for the last number of weeks in the Mission Partnership. During that time we have considered that we have considered that:

- Prayer is among the highest of heaven's gifts to us - possibly higher than preaching;
- Prayer is the root of the church's spiritual life and power, capable of opening the storehouse of heaven;
- Prayer is a pilgrimage, requiring perseverance, which takes us into the very heart of God.

Today I want to stretch the theme of perseverance further. Prayer is a fight.



### Prayer:

Lord Jesus Christ, we thank you that we can bring all our anxieties, concerns and prayers to you. Nothing is off the table when we come to our Father in heaven.

But prayer is more - its not just about praying for our nearest and dearest. Prayer is like a fight. Prayer is like a wrestling match where we engage in mortal combat on behalf of a needy world. Through the Holy Spirit, help us to discern and work out how you want us to pray. In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

### Song: Be Thou My Vision:

We all have plans, dreams and visions for our lives  
Martin Luthor King famously proclaimed, "I have a dream."  
Our mayor Andy Burnham has a plan about Manchester.  
Boris Johnson has a dream for the UK.

God has a mission to bring heaven to earth. He wants our vision to be *his* vision. Let's join in our first song, *Be Thou My Vision*.

### Quiz:

Covid 19 is a new pandemic that has caught us completely unawares. At the moment it feels like we are trying to catch up with it - that we are in the shadows. A day will come when we are on top of it, but that day is not yet here. We pray that day arrives soon.

One small bug has turned our world upside down.

It has confused politicians, economists, the hospitality sector, schools, and the church. So, until it will be good to remember something of how we got here.

Please humour me as we do a small quiz. (The answers are at the end of the sheet.)

1. What does Boris Johnson, pop star Pink, former wrestler and actor Dwayne "The Rock" Johnson" and Rita Wilson, wife of actor Tom Hanks, all have in common?
2. What was the name of the Chinese doctor who originally brought Covid 19 to international attention?
3. Who instigated the 10 weeks of clapping for the NHS during the lockdown?
4. What is the "R" number?
5. How far did Capt Tom Moore walk on his 99th birthday to raise money for the NHS?

There is a theme of struggle and fight to today's service.

Our battle

Prayer is like fighting.

For any children watching, listen to your parents and stay out of fights.

But do pray!

The Apostle Paul explored this idea with the imagery of Roman warfare. We can explore it today with the battle against an

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unseen virus. And today's Bible reading in Genesis, where the idea of prayerful warfare is explored through wrestling ...

### Bible Reading: Genesis 32:22-32

That night Jacob got up and took his two wives, his two female servants and his eleven sons and crossed the ford of the Jabbok. After he had sent them across the stream, he sent over all his possessions. So Jacob was left alone, and a man wrestled with him till daybreak. When the man saw that he could not overpower him, he touched the socket of Jacob's hip so that his hip was wrenched as he wrestled with the man. **26** Then the man said, "Let me go, for it is daybreak."

But Jacob replied, "I will not let you go unless you bless me."

The man asked him, "What is your name?" "Jacob," he answered.

Then the man said, "Your name will no longer be Jacob, but Israel,<sup>[a]</sup> because you have struggled with God and with humans and have overcome."

Jacob said, "Please tell me your name."

But he replied, "Why do you ask my name?" Then he blessed him there.

So Jacob called the place Peniel, saying, "It is because I saw God face to face, and yet my life was spared."

The sun rose above him as he passed Peniel, and he was limping because of his hip. Therefore to this day the Israelites do not eat the tendon attached to the socket of the hip, because the socket of Jacob's hip was touched near the tendon.



### Talk 1: Coming Out Of the Shadows:



Who is this mystery assailant whom Jacob is fighting with?  
Is he some sort of masked angelic ninja?  
Let's find out.

An old Chinese proverb says this: "You don't really know someone until you have fought them."

It is through through combat that Jacob is able to unmask his adversary.

Initially, Jacob asks to know the name of the mystery wrestler, but doesn't get a direct answer.

However, there are some clues to help us expose the identity of this mystery mugger. What are these clues?

Firstly, the fact that the assailant's name is not revealed is a clue in itself.

In the times of the Old Testament it was taboo to mention the name of God.

Instead, the title of *Adonai* is used, which means Lord.

God is a bit of a mystery.

Secondly, the mystery adversary gives Jacob a new name - Israel.

Israel means "to struggle with God."

When we put these two clues together the mystery seems to be solved!

Brilliant! Let's go home and put on the kettle!

But not so fast ...!

His true identity has to be shrouded because human beings are unable to see God face to face.

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In a previous round Moses asked to see God's true face, something which God would not do.

The usual explanation is that such exposure to God holiness is lethal. But Jacob emerged from the fight shocked to be alive because he had seen God; an honour that even Moses was not permitted to enjoy.

Jacob named the place where he had fought God, calling it "Peniel" which means "I've seen God face to face and survived". In a way, you could regard Peniel as an early squared circle, or a Bronze Age wrestling ring of sorts.



I remember watching wrestling matches when I was a child.  
I rather confess to enjoying some of the masked wrestlers being unmasked.  
In a sense, God is like a masked wrestler, but not out of choice.  
We don't talk about God enough.  
We don't think about Him much.  
We think that this world is ours to do as we please, rather than his.  
Have we pushed God into the shadows?  
Have we nudged God out of sight?

But the whole story of the Bible is about God coming out of the shadows.  
God refuses to remain unknown.  
We *are* going to see his face.  
We *will* know his name.

What's this got to do with prayer?  
We will find out how shortly ...

### Reflective song.

#### Talk 2: A Prayerful Response

We saw that Jacob's wrestling with God was more than just a physical fight.

Through combat, we get to know our adversary.

Through combat, Jacob got to know God. We see that God is coming out of the shadows.

Jacob's wrestling is often regarded as an allegory for prayer.

Prayer is wrestling with God and meeting him on very personal terms.

Jesus also shows this in various parables. So Jacob's wrestling and Jesus' words amount to the same thing:

If we care to notice we will see that God is coming out of the shadows.

But what about now?

Now we feel that God is back in the shadows.

According to our General Secretary, Rev'd Dr John Bradbury, our denomination has been in quiet decline since its inception. And now Covid has turned our world upside down leaving us all confused. Where is God?

Or maybe God is still at work.

Maybe it is us who are in the shadows. Does anyone have a suggestion how 12 URC churches are to proceed.



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I'm not sure I do.  
Maybe we need some fresh light on our situation.

So what do we do?  
We start with praying.  
And I want to suggest using a prayer pattern which uses what God has told us about himself.  
As well as praying to God to move by his grace, it may remind us of whom he is.

The New Testament often uses triplets.  
We have faith, hope and love.  
We are told to love God, our neighbour and ourselves.  
Jesus is the same yesterday, today and forever.  
These triplets remind us about something of the nature of God.  
God is trinitarian - Father, Son and Holy Spirit.  
For us, languishing in the shadows, this is our clue to God's nature and His relationship to the world.

Firstly, God is the Father - the creator of heaven and earth.  
He saw this world turn the wrong way and decided to act  
He has decided to re-establish his Kingdom on earth.

Secondly, God is the Son, the divine one who became human and lived among us.  
He announced the coming of God's Kingdom.  
Human nature is corrupt and broken, and we prefer to keep this in the shadows.  
Jesus brings our sin into the light.  
But he doesn't condemn us - he shows us mercy.

Thirdly, we have the Holy Spirit.  
The often forgotten member of the Trinity, the breath of God who is God's continued presence on this planet.  
The Holy Spirit originally called every one of us into God's presence.



The Holy Spirit distributes all the resources we need from God's storehouse.  
The Holy Spirit renews us.

This is to whom we pray.  
Perhaps this is how we should pray.  
If we engage in the struggle of prayer  
If we are humble  
We may just come out of the shadows.  
Maybe we will meet God in a new way.

### Song:

### Prayers:

During November we are asking for the churches of the Missional Partnership to pray in unity.  
As we give prayerful consideration to the future direction of our churches, we ask you to pray for God's kingdom and his will to shape our churches and ministries.  
We ask for people who are shielding at home, for mid-week groups and congregations to pray this when they meet to worship.

Let us pray:  
Father God, thank you that you desire to have a relationship with us.  
You don't want to be like a stranger.  
You refuse to stay in the shadows.

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Father Almighty,  
Maker of the heavens and the earth,  
***Set your kingdom in our midst.***

Lord Jesus Christ,  
Son of the Living God,  
***Have mercy on me, a sinner.***

Holy Spirit,  
Breath of the Living God,  
***Renew me, the Church, and all the world.***  
Amen.

### **Communion:**

As we continue our time of prayer we come to our Communion part of the service.  
Praying isn't just spiritual - its practical and physical.  
We can turn everyday objects and tasks into prayerful activity;  
hoovering, walking, dusting;  
Jesus takes everyday objects, like bread and wine,  
To remind us that we are united with heaven.  
We invite people at home to join this communion with your own bread and wine.

The Apostle Paul reminds us: "For I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took a loaf of bread **(hold loaf)** and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, 'This is my body which is broken for you. Do this in remembrance of me'.

**(Hold wine)** In the same way he took the cup also, after supper, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me'. For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes." (1 Corinthians 11.23-26)



Physical objects can tell a story;  
Physical activity can be a prayer.

**(Share bread)** The bread tells us of Jesus Christ, who gave his body to rescue us Eat this to come close to Jesus in friendship. Please eat the bread when you receive it.

**(Share wine)** We are invited to take a glass of wine: this the blood of Christ making a new covenant - a new promise - for the forgiveness of sin. Drink of it, all of you, to come close to Jesus in friendship. We will drink the wine together.

The blood of Christ shed to rescue us.  
**(Drink wine)**

### **Summary, Response and Blessing:**

Today we have seen that God refuses to stay in the shadows.

We can come close to him, and maybe we will be drawn out of the shadows.

This will involve wrestling in prayer.

But as we pray, we are drawn closer to God in prayer.

Our powerlessness is our advantage; for it compels us to lean towards God.

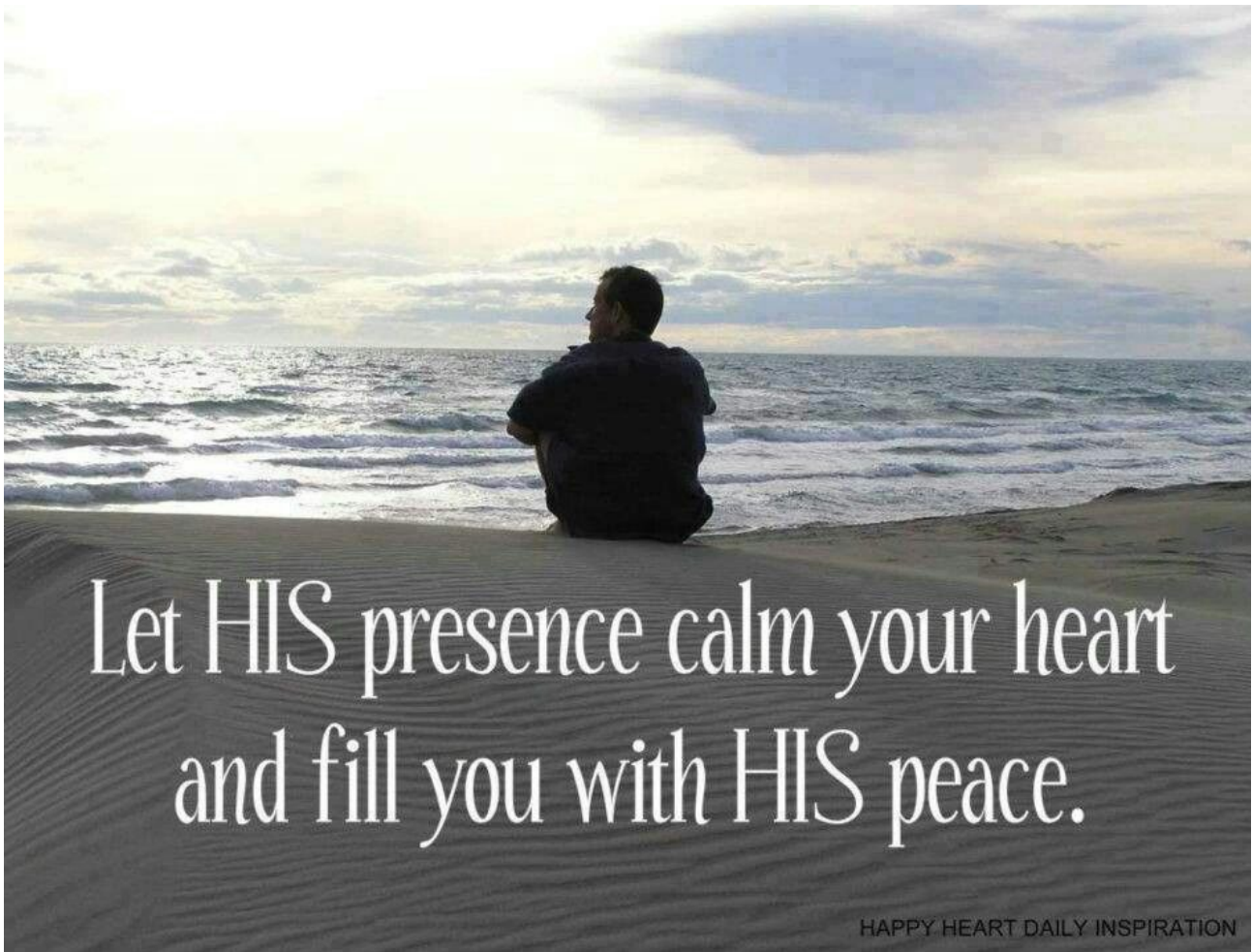
**Coming Out of the Shadows**  
**Genesis 32.22-32**

May the Lord bless you, and keep you;  
May the Lord make His face shine on you,  
And be gracious to you;  
May he Lord lift up His countenance on  
you,  
And give you peace.'

*(Numbers 6:22-27)*

**Answers to quiz:**

1. All diagnosed "positive" with COVID-19;
2. Ai Fen and Dr. Li Wenliang,
3. Annemarie Plas;
4. The "R" number is rate of reproduction of the virus.
5. 100 laps of his garden.



Let HIS presence calm your heart  
and fill you with HIS peace.

HAPPY HEART DAILY INSPIRATION