

**Weekly Bible Study
group – November 19, 2008**

This week's reading assignment: Genesis 32

In the second half of Genesis 32, we come across a fascinating and confusing story. One night, as Jacob is preparing to meet his brother Esau near the river Jabbok, he encounters a man. Or is it an angel? Or is it GOD? The answer in the text seems to be: yes.

Jacob wrestles with this man (whom he later realizes is God himself). While they are wrestling, the man touches Jacob's hip and dislocates it. Jacob is wounded by God in this struggle. And yet he continues to wrestle. He won't let go until this God/man gives him a blessing.

In the end, Jacob receives his blessing. God gives him a whole new name: *Israel*. This man Israel becomes the foundation of a new nation, a new people. God's chosen people, Israel and the Church, trace our history back to this fateful night near the river Jabbok.

But what is the significance of this story? Among other things, it is the name itself. "Israel" means "struggles with God." And this is the name that was given to not only one man, but to all of God's "chosen people."

Amazing! Built into the very identity of God's people is the idea of wrestling, struggling with God. We are that people.

Are we afraid to wrestle with God? Do we think that he somehow cannot handle our fists and our questions? Jacob wrestled, and he was blessed.

Maybe what God is looking for is a community that will **engage** with him and his plan for the world...even if that looks like struggling sometimes. Are we serious enough about this relationship to live the hard parts too? Are we serious enough about giving our lives for the blessing of the world – serious enough to ask hard questions and not let go until we hear the answer?

In the end, we realize that even though we've wrestled with God, we haven't been struggling with an enemy. We've been wrestling with a lover, a God who intends to bless and restore not only us, but all of his broken creation. In this wrestling we are embraced by God, even though we may be wounded and limping for now.

So our questions this week are these:

How honestly are you engaging with God? Do you care enough to struggle? Are you content to sit back and watch, reciting easy answers? Or are you going to claim this relationship as your own? Are you willing to be wounded in the process? Are you ready to be blessed?