

Commentary on the Gospel for Tue, Jul 7th 2015

After pretending to do so multiple times during our discussion last week, one of my spiritual directors finally smacked my forehead. For about the fourteenth time that evening, I had taken it upon myself to determine what next steps I needed to take in order to “love God” in a better way. As my priests tirelessly remind me, I am but a helpless infant who only needs to raise my hands up and cry for God and he will answer. But yet again, I put the onus on my actions and sought out what I could do next. In short, I was again wrestling with God.

Jacob’s wrestling match with his divine opponent tells me two specific things. First, God loves it when we engage him. Jacob earns a new name when he took on the challenge that God gave him wholeheartedly. And secondly, the Lord does not always answer the specific questions we have about the trials he puts in our paths. Just as Jacob was not given the name of his opponent, so too we need to accept some element of comfort with uncertainty in the challenges that God grants us. We need to learn to play by God’s rules.

It’s precisely that, objecting to God’s rules and instituting my own, that my spiritual director caught me guilty of last week. Wrestling with the big issues God gives us is good and holy, but we need to show God our trust by not asking stupid questions and by letting him make the rules.

Expecting some sympathy from my meek and loving girlfriend in sharing with her the unconventional thwack I received from my spiritual director, she smiled and said, “Good! Someone needs to do that to you.” Her words opened my eyes to how frequently our individual wrestling matches with God are secret only to ourselves. Our close family and friends may be valuable resources in helping us recognize the ways we need to let God pin us down.

These scripture verses encourage me to ask three questions.

Jacob reacted to the challenges God gave him and came out transformed with a different name in the end. In what ways will I allow God to change me through the challenges he lays before me?

Which close confidants or spiritual directors should I ask to help me identify the areas where I am inappropriately wrestling with God?

In what ways can I more obediently let God set the boundaries and dictate the course of the trials he provides me?

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