

# *A Blessed Limp*

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Genesis 32:22-31

*“...You have striven with God and with humans, and have prevailed.”*

Change is bad. We like the predictable, the known, and the common. We like the status quo because it is what we have been doing, and offers the least change - which is bad. Hence the phrase, “We’ve always done it that way,” speaks to stubbornness, but also to comfort, ease, and peace of mind. “If it works, don’t fix it,” we tell ourselves, and normally stick to such advice. In our driving patterns, our morning routines, our weekend rituals, and even the way we read our mail, we find a comfortable pattern and hold it. When conflict arises, usually you can see what truly are your normal patterns. Each family has its own way to deal with conflict, be it laughing, lying, smiling, or crying - there is a status quo response. When an outsider joins that family, then things are challenged in great ways. Consider the movie, *One Flew Over the Cuckoo Nest*. In that movie, much like an interloper entering into a family system, Jack Nicklson’s entered into the institution, confronted the conflict resolutions of the head Nurse, and disrupted the status quo of the institution causing great distress. Ronald Reagan once described thusly: “Status quo, you know, that is Latin for ‘the mess we’re in.’” But we like our mess, we like our chaos, because it is what we know, and what we are used to. We like the hymns we know, the prayers we have learned, the seats we have claimed, and the church of which we have always been a part. We are animals of habit, conditioned to a holding pattern, and that is normally the status quo - the comfortable, the safe, and the known. We like what is known, and we tend to like the status quo.

Jacob had finally found a place where he could relax and enjoy life. If you read back about a chapter in Genesis you can see the kind of life Jacob was living. He had his family, he had land, and he had straightened everything out with Laban, his father-in-law. Jacob was in a prime place to settle down, and slide into the status quo groove that he would surly enjoy. Sure, there were some things for Jacob to worry about. He was a foreigner in a strange land, but Jacob could adapt. He was still building his own family and tribe, but Jacob was well on his way to prosperity. This was a good place for Jacob, it was a comfortable place for Jacob, and the status quo was looking pretty good. He has been through a lot; he had to run from his brother and he had to work so he could marry his two wives. He had to pay his dues time and time again, and now his hard work was going to pay off. Jacob had finally found a place where he could relax and enjoy life.

But it wasn’t enough for Jacob. Jacob was restless, and wasn’t ready to just settle down. He looked off to the horizon and saw the land from whence he came. He looked off to the horizon and saw where he was raised, the land his father was given, and his father before him, Isaac and Abraham. Jacob knew it could be better, he knew life could be better, and wanted change. So he decided it was time to return home. Now there were difficulties ahead of him, he brother Esau was still lurking about, and was still angry. Remember that Jacob had stolen much from Esau - birthright and family blessing. The trek itself could be a challenge, but Esau held the greatest threat. It was going to be a tremendous risk, but Jacob thought it was time to return home. He knew life could be better, and he was restless and ready for the change.

We are living with the status quo, but maybe you find yourself from time to time ready for a change. Maybe you look around, you take a moment to take stock of your life and you say to yourself, “I could do better, things could be better.” Have you ever found yourself in that position? It might come from looking off to the horizon and seeing where you could be. It might come from looking over the fence and seeing the way your neighbor is living and seeing the good influence your neighbor is having on you. Enough of the routine, the

predictable, the known and the safe. Enough of the status quo, because things could be better. Think of those who started the civil rights movement. They looked off to the horizon and saw the possibility of unbridled freedom, of equal rights, and said, “things could be better.” In the workers movement, workers were experiencing long hours, the harsh working conditions, the low pay and said, “things could be better.” The whole Protestant Reformation occurred because Luther and others look at Catholicism and said, “things could be better.”

Here at this church, in this past year, we saw more children coming to worship, and said we could offer more, we could do better, and we hosted a Vacation Bible School. We looked at who we were, what we were doing, and said, “things could be better.”

Think of relationships between your neighbors, your friends, your family members. Are they what you want? Are you getting what you need, or could things be better. Is there room to grow; is there a place to grow into, could things be better? The main character in the movie, *Bugs Life* was constantly looking at the status quo, at the amount of work they had to do, at the payment they had to constantly make to the grasshoppers, and said, “things could be better,” and through failed inventions, and grand quests, he worked hard to make things better. Maybe you think the status quo is fine, maybe you like the way things are right now, but maybe you think we could do better.

But be careful, because the new horizon holds difficulties, it holds problems, and it holds danger. Remember Esau? He was waiting for Jacob, and not to greet him with a hug. That’s why Jacob went through all of the trouble of sending half of his family and then the other half and gifts in front of him. Jacob knew the difficulty and the threat before him, he knew that Esau was waiting for him, but still Jacob did not want to remain in the status quo, he wanted to go home. As we look forward, as we move forward, as we say, “we can do better than this,” and then try, remembering that there are difficulties waiting for us. In the civil rights movement, they knew that there were going to be many challenges, dangers, and difficulties. They knew this as they crossed that bridge in Montgomery facing the dangers ahead of them, and yet they went forward. When we decided to do a VBS, we knew that there would be difficulties; we knew that many challenges faced us, and yet we still went ahead. Maybe you have a broken relationship with someone – if you go to bring wholeness to that relationship you will face challenges, you will have to name the hurt and maybe stay in it and live in it. There are challenges ahead. If you are going to call the world to move out of the status quo, to do better and live better, remember that there are challenges ahead. The new horizon holds difficulties.

That’s the whole idea, isn’t it? Change brings difficulties. Trying to do things differently, and hopefully better will be challenging and hard. We could face failure, we could face rejection, and we could be hurt. We prepare ourselves as best we can. Jacob tried to do everything he could to prepare for the challenge ahead of him, but he still had to struggle with God. Now let me be clear that there are many ways to understand this passage, but think of this one. What if God is challenging Jacob’s decision to go home? What if God is asking Jacob, “how far are you willing to go, how big of a chance are you willing to take?” Maybe you have felt this. Maybe you have been getting ready for a change, a change you know is right, and change you feel is the best thing, but you keep getting challenged. One of my prayers in the dark of the sanctuary is, God I am ready to do what you want. And God’s response has been, *how far are you willing to go, because I am asking for everything?* Then I look to the cross and see what is required to follow Jesus.

Do you ever feel like God is wrestling with you at those moments? I once decided to help with a day camp for inner city children. I thought it was time for me to leave the comfort of my white, safe existence. I thought, “I could do better in my ministry.” I was challenged. I saw things that caused my heart to break. I was pushed in ways I have never been pushed. I was pulled, I was insulted, I was played, and I felt like I was beaten. There was a time when I thought I needed to get out. It was the second day and I was trying to lead a group of 7 year olds. They wouldn’t listen, they didn’t care, and they talked back. I was ready to quit, when another teacher stepped in and helped with the discipline, and gave me new hope and new strength. I stuck it out despite the frustration and the trouble, and the experience was, overall, very positive. Maybe I left with a bit of a limp,

maybe I left with some scars from the experience, but I left changed and blessed.

Do you see what could happen? When we decide to look to the horizon, when we decide that we could do better, it doesn't mean that life will immediately be easy. It doesn't mean that we will coast out of the status quo into the brave new world for which we hope. It means that there will be some difficulties, there will be some challenges, and we may even wrestle with our own understanding of God, or maybe even wrestle with God. Think of our VBS program. The seed was planted to try VBS, and immediately God started wrestling with us, challenging our doubts, challenging our over-expectant hopes. What if we try to invite 100 children - God wrestled with that. What if we try to have it at someone's house - God wrestled with that. What if we wait one more year - God wrestled with that. God challenged, wrestled, and held us to the task at hand - a VBS for children. And we did it. And we made it, and we now all have a limp, because it was hard, it was tiring, and it was blessed.

Think of the broken relationships in your life. Maybe you have fallen out with a family member and have decided to try to reconcile that relationship. Will you suffice with a letter - God will be wrestling with you. Will you settle with a phone call - God will be wrestling with you. Will you settle for seeing your brother, your mother, your father, or whoever only on Christmas and Thanksgiving - God will be wrestling with you. Or will you stay with God, wrestle with God and address the hurts and the brokenness of your relationship with that other person. All through the night, all through the day, returning to the wounds of the broken hope. This is the reconciliation we are meant to do, it is what Dr. Robert Franklin calls, "Tragic Reconciliation," because it hurts and at the end you will walk with a limp in your heart. But at the same time, you will walk with a new name, a new person; you will be blessed by God.

Oh look in the world and think how we could do better. Oh look around this church and think how we could do better. Oh look in your own life and think how we could do better. And reach for that horizon, prepare for the challenges and the difficulties, and know that God will be with you. God will be with you challenging you, wrestling with you, guiding you, and blessing you. In the night of your soul and in the daylight of your hope, God will be with you. And you will be changed. You will be scarred, you will be hurt, but you will be blessed. That blessed limp, that holy hurt, because it is a limp that reminds us of our own sanctification, of our own redemption through the guidance of God.

AMEN