

## **WRESTLING WITH CONFIDENCE** (MT 14:13-21, Gen 32:22-31)

Rev. Corinne Hodges, Aug. 3, 2008, SJOC

Put yourself in the disciples' shoes in our gospel reading today. You look out at the crowd of thousands. They are perhaps hungry and tired, but more than that they are mesmerized by Jesus and the healings he has done. You have five loaves of bread and two fish. Jesus blesses and breaks these into pieces and then instructs you to give them to the people. You look at him, shocked. How in the world are you going to do this? Share bits with thousands of people? You might look out at the people and wonder where do I begin? You might even start to turn back to Jesus and say, "But there is not enough..." Jesus tells you to do it anyways. He does not say, "Try it and see how far it goes." He speaks with full confidence that God will provide.

God's provisions. This is not a concept that many of us are comfortable with, and I include myself in this number of thousands. But I learned a great lesson about God's provisions about seven years ago, when I, like Jacob, experienced a hip injury.

I have been swimming since age 18 and many weeks, at least five days a week. In fact, in my twenties, I was obsessive about exercise, often working out twice a day. Occasionally, even three times a day! Well about seven years ago, I had just finished my mile in the pool and I climbed out, put my right foot down as usual, but when I placed my left foot on the deck, instantly I felt pain and collapsed to the floor. I tried to stand again, grabbed for the wall and found my way. I went to the doctor and discovered I had an avulsion fracture, a fracture caused by none other than over-usage. The pain was intense and as I learned, it not only limited me in my more physical activities like running and swimming, but I could not walk far, I could not sit for long periods of time and sleeping was the worst, as I sleep on my side.

Those of you who have had fractures know that there is often not much you can do. So through this process, I learned four things. The first was rest. Rest was not a concept I knew much about, but it was exactly what the doctor prescribed. I

realized I was not invincible and my body breaks down. I also learned that I cannot rush the healing. I needed to be patient. Furthermore, I am not in charge. I could not simply will myself better. And finally, I needed help—physically, mentally and spiritually. This last one is what I struggled the most with...what I wrestled the most with God about.

During my healing and recovery, you know what happened? There were days when I felt better, more self-sufficient and stronger. One point for me! But then I'd get ahead of myself, do too much and have a set back. Two points for God! And this is how it would go, back and forth until finally, I had to surrender. Not just partially, but completely. I had to stop. When I did this, I discovered that I was all the better for it. Not only did my body get the rest it needed, but I had time to explore other aspects of my life. I was able to delve into my studies for my Master's of Divinity degree. I was doing an internship in pastoral care at a hospital. It was so difficult to walk the halls that I learned to visit fewer people, but spend more time with them. In general, I became wiser, learning my limits. And after feeling distant and resistant to God's help, we became very close.

It was during this time that my priest, (little did I know he would become a bishop, Bishop George Cuncell of New Jersey) shared with me a prayer he kept in his shirt pocket. This prayer is the Prayer of Abandonment and I share it with you today:

### **Prayer of Abandonment**

(A version of the prayer by Charles de Foucauld)

Gracious God,  
I abandon myself into your hands;  
Do with me what you will.  
Whatever you may do, I thank you:  
I am ready for all, I accept all.  
Let only your will be done in me,  
I wish no more than this.

For I love you, Lord,  
And so need to give of myself,  
To surrender myself into your hands,  
Without reserve, and with boundless confidence.

Amen.

Boundless confidence...that could be what Jacob had as he wrestled with God. But there is a big difference between the absolute confidence Jesus had in feeding the 5,000 and the confidence Jacob exuded. Jacob's confidence was in himself. Jesus' confidence was in God.

But Jacob learned great lesson that night. As he felt his soar hip, as he started to tire, he gained the knowledge of who he was fighting. God tells him he has fought with the Divine and Jacob asks for confirmation by requesting to know God's name. He then asks for God's blessing and gives up the fight. No longer did he have to win. God appeared to Jacob in order to guide him. The big question was, "Would he be led?"

As Jacob left the scene that early morning, he limped along. When he limped, he felt the pain, remembered his wrestling, and his coming face-to-face with the Divine. That wrestling changed his life; it brought him closer to God. Now it was not something he would have asked for, but it ended up being something he was indeed grateful for. Although he was physically worn down, he was spiritually fed and rejoiced with a new name and a new sense of self.

We are all limping along in some way or fashion, aren't we? Many of us have wrestled with God. We are walking around with wounds that won't completely heal. These wounds can serve as reminders of our humanity, obsessiveness and mistakes we have made in the past. Even years later, my hip still flares up and tells me to listen, slow down, get quiet and depend on God, not myself. As human beings, we must realize our dependence on God is not a shortcoming...it is a great gift!