

3 August

Do you walk with a limp? Perhaps not a visible one like I usually do or Ruth does when her knee is complaining....but perhaps a limp in your soul like Jacob had. Jacob wrestled with God and received a limp and a blessing. Perhaps you are so focused on your limp that you have not recognized the blessing that came with it? Jacob was wrestling the night before he was to meet with Esau, the older brother whom he had cheated so terribly....it was no wonder that Jacob was restless.

I meet with a group of men on Thursday mornings at St. Stephen's Church at 9:00 AM for reflection and accountability. There is great love, respect and mutual support in the group but there is also truth telling and accountability. Most, but not all are members of St. Stephens. I would say that the youngest are at or at least approaching 65 and several are my age. Part of what we do is reveal our limps.

This Thursday after parking, as I was stepping up and over curbs and slowly approaching the entrance, I noticed way to my right a young man also headed to the church. He was way behind me, but got there well before me to open the door. He was young, thin, in a hurry and ending a cell phone conversation as he hurried up a series of steps before me. I could not help but notice that he was wearing a black clergy shirt and collar. I also could not help but think "Darn, that was

me once, young, spry, engaged and in a hurry to get someplace and do something important". Now I just sort of limp along.

But I was blessed to be headed to that hour long meeting of mutual revelation and accountability with this group of men. My limp has slowed me down but given me the time to be blessed by others.

People often describe experiences of God in their lives as "spiritual highs" .....people can even get addicted to the "highs" and delight in extoling over and over how wonderful they were. I have been involved in the church long enough to see many renewal movements move through the church with great enthusiasm and then slowly cool and die. They give a shot of adrenaline that does not last. It is without question wonderful to be in a community of seekers like Fork Church and feel the presence of the Holy Spirit of God. Great worship, music, and liturgy can create those moments and sustain us.....and that experience exists here.

But more importantly and at a deeper level we also need unadorned black & white, cold sober, face to face encounters with God. I think the Hebrew Bible provides us with a valuable, realistic, unsentimental, sober respect for encounters with God. There is in those Old Testament stories a sense that you could not see the face of God and still live. You might recall how Moses had to shield his face so that

he could not see God...he lived but came away with a bad sunburn just from God passing near. You cannot see God face to face and live as you were before. You have to be changed to live fully.

I think the deep point is that God is ultimate and total truth. Everything that is false, phony, untruthful including our ego will be burned away if we face the truth of God with it. Like ripping off a bandage and scab there will be pain and perhaps a raw wound that will cause us to limp.....but if we look deeply we will also recognize that we have been blessed in some unexpected way. It is at times likened to the purification of Gold or silver by burning off the dross. Irenaeus, the early Church Father observed that “the glory of God is a human being fully alive”. (That is worth repeating). To be fully alive we have to face and deal with those truths that have caused us to limp. Yes the bandages have to come off and the dross burned away.

Parishes almost always have limps also. I recently was sent this:

#### MORAL OF THE PORCUPINE

It was the coldest winter ever. Many animals died because of the cold. The porcupines, realizing the situation, decided to group together to keep warm. This way they covered and protected themselves; but the quills of each one wounded their closest companions.

After a while, they decided to distance themselves one from the other

and they began to die, alone and frozen. So they had to make a choice: either accept the quills of their companions or disappear from the Earth.

Wisely, they decided to go back to being together. They learned to live with the little wounds caused by the close relationship with their companions in order to receive the heat that came from the others. This way they were able to survive.

The best relationship is not the one that brings together perfect people, but when each individual learns to live with the imperfections of others and can admire the other person's good qualities.

Fork church has its' limps. After seven months with you we are still not clear about all of the sources of the wounds and it really doesn't matter. You have been blessed with a new start with a new priest. Jacob and Esau were reconciled. Some of you may need reconciliation.....we must pray that any who have been hurt and left will be reconciled and return. As the porcupines learned, it is awfully cold out there alone. Jacob was given the new name "Israel", your name remains "The Fork Church" but you are blessed to have the opportunity to become together a community of people fully alive: The Glory of God in your midst in Doswell Virginia.

