

Poole Bay Methodist Circuit worship

Sunday 2nd August 2026

BLESS ME! - Led by Reverend Karen James

Hello friends, I am very pleased to be able to share in this time of worship with you. I have just recently returned from my three-month sabbatical- a time of challenge and of blessing- and I am grateful for the warm welcome back that I have received, and for my colleagues, congregations and communities across the circuit that have enabled me to have the space.

This week we hear of a bizarre encounter that Jacob has, one that reads more like a parable, and certainly contains many layers of meaning within it. And we will also hear the introductory verses that lead to the Feeding of the Five Thousand, both passages revealing a level of persistence by their protagonists as they seek blessing.

So let us seek God's blessing here in our worship. Taking time to slow our thinking and doing and centre our whole being on God...we sing

Hymn: STF 109 - [Creator God \(In the darkness of the still night\) | Lyrics](#)

In the darkness of the still night, in the dawning of the daylight,
in the mystery of creation, Creator God you are there.

In the breath of every being, in the birthing and the growing,
in the earth and all its fullness, Creator God, you are there.

In the homeless and the hungry, in the broken and the lonely,
in the grieving of your people, Creator God, you are there.
In the tears and in the heartache, in the love through which we serve you,
in the anguish of the dying, Creator God, you are there.

In our hearts and in our thinking, in the longing and the dreaming,
in the yearning of our heartbeat, Creator God, you are there.
In the love for one another, in the sharing of our being,
in receiving and forgiving, Creator God, you are there.

In our joys, our hopes, our healing, in awakening to revealing,
in your call and our responding, Creator God, you are there.
In our prayer and in our service, in our praise and in our worship,
in your love that is eternal Creator God, you are there.
in your love that is eternal Creator God, you are there. *Margaret Rizza*

Prayer of thanks and praise *(adapted from Roots for Churches [Prayers](#))*

All-powerful God,
how can we ever thank you enough
for what you did and continue to do for us?

All creation praises you for we are fearfully and wonderfully made.
 Despite our stubborn attempts to do things our way and our way alone,
 You never give up on us. Your love never wains.
 You know and understand each of us and the choices that we make,
 Whatever circumstances we find ourselves in, we can cling tight and draw strength from you,
 for you have hold of us.
 You never let go. You never abandon us, even when we seem to be alone,
 Thank you that you work all things for our good, nurturing us and strengthening our character.
 Lord God, we give you thanks and praise.

Amen.

Pause for a moment to bring to mind where we have turned away from God in this week, whether through our action or inaction, lack of compassion for ourselves and for others, how we have spoken to, or ignored others.

Merciful God, when we turn to face you and through the life and saving actions of Jesus, our sins are forgiven. We give you thanks and praise. Amen

Genesis 32:22-31 - Jacob wrestles with God

²²That night Jacob got up and took his two wives, his two female servants and his eleven sons and crossed the ford of the Jabbok. ²³After he had sent them across the stream, he sent over all his possessions. ²⁴So Jacob was left alone, and a man wrestled with him till daybreak. ²⁵When the man saw that he could not overpower him, he touched the socket of Jacob's hip so that his hip was wrenched as he wrestled with the man. ²⁶Then the man said, 'Let me go, for it is daybreak.'

But Jacob replied, 'I will not let you go unless you bless me.'

²⁷The man asked him, 'What is your name?'

'Jacob,' he answered.

²⁸Then the man said, 'Your name will no longer be Jacob, but Israel,^[a] because you have struggled with God and with humans and have overcome.'

²⁹Jacob said, 'Please tell me your name.'

But he replied, 'Why do you ask my name?' Then he blessed him there.

³⁰So Jacob called the place Peniel,^[b] saying, 'It is because I saw God face to face, and yet my life was spared.'

³¹The sun rose above him as he passed Peniel,^[c] and he was limping because of his hip.

New International Version – UK

Matthew 14:13-14

¹³When Jesus heard what had happened [that John the Baptist had been killed], he withdrew by boat privately to a solitary place. Hearing of this, the crowds followed him on foot from the towns. ¹⁴When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them and healed those who were ill.

New International Version - UK

Reflection

(This song includes the broader background to the passage)

[I Will Not Let You Go | Genesis 32 | a Worship Song About Wrestling with God and Transformation](#)

Song Title: I Will Not Let You Go Bible Chapter: Genesis 32 Artist: A4GC Worship)

I remember watching the World Wrestling Federation/Entertainment programmes on ITV when I was a child. It usually followed the Saturday morning kids shows, which is the only reason that I can think we ended up watching it. It was in the days of Big Daddy and Giant Haystacks, and of course much of it was carefully choreographed but to my eyes at the time, it looked like they were really out to cause harm to each other. This remains my only encounter with this sport. Fighting with siblings doesn't count!

The passage today from Genesis is a far cry from the noise of the crowd and the showmanship of the ring. Indeed it is a strange story. Set just after Jacob finally managing to be free of Laban's, his Father-in-law', control and preparing to go and meet with his older brother Esau, whom he had not seen since Jacob had tricked their father into giving him the blessing intended for his brother.

And we should note that Jacob had always been a tricky character, living up to the definition of his name- 'deceiver' or 'heel' but at this point in Jacob's story he was finally having to face up to the consequences of his past actions

Jacob was alone, all of his household and all of his possessions had been sent across the Jabbok. He was alone and he had nothing. Mirroring his state when he ran away from his home all those years ago. And yet God provided, despite Jacobs tricks and manipulations. Over those years he found a home, family, gained status and possessions of his own. One could even say that he had been blessed.

And then, seemingly out of nowhere a man came and began to wrestle with Jacob. The fight lasted all night- with Jacob desperate to prevail. I am somewhat in awe of Jacob's determination in this story- the absolute drive he must have had to sustain him through this encounter. We do not know what it is that either of the men want at this moment- it seems a test of strength and of endurance simply for the sake of it. Perhaps both too stubborn to give in. I know I can recall occasions, where my stubbornness has overtaken my ability to be reasonable, usually because I want to 'win'. Especially where I perceive an injustice to have occurred. On further reflection I realise that each time, I needed something to prompt me to this action- something or someone to wrestle with whether it was for a righteous cause or a selfish one.

But wrestling constantly (physically, spiritually, metaphorically) is exhausting and often comes with a cost or consequences.

In this instance we have a further strange incident when the man punches the inner part (the hollow) of Jacob's thigh so hard that the hip is dislocated. So strong is Jacob's hold on him that he appears to be resorting to desperate measures himself to finish the fight. Even then, even though he has been wounded, Jacob does not let go. The catalyst for this action seems to be that it is nearly sunrise.

Often in literary texts of this time and place the time of day would add meaning to the story being shared- the rising of the sun was a significant moment; it brought transformation and revelation

and new beginnings. At this point in the story Jacob, and us, have worked out that this unnamed figure is divine- if Jacob were to see God, face to face, in full glory- he would die. Perhaps the urgency to conclude is God seeking to protect Jacob from that, that Jacob is not yet ready for that revelation, sometimes God's timing makes no sense to us. Perhaps God recognised that Jacob would not stop until he was completely drained of energy, of life. It is part of the enigma and wonder of this particular story. We do not know.

Still Jacob, wounded and in pain-clung to the man "I will not let you go until you bless me!"(v26) Bless me! Reading this passage again and it has caused me to pause and try to recall when I had so determinedly demanded God's blessing. I wonder if any of us have? For Jacob at this point it is not about being blessed with possessions, family. It is about him in that moment. All that had gone before, all that will happen after, is insignificant- Bless me *now* as I am.

Jacob, whose default method of managing in life was deception and either trying to avoid the consequences or be resentful if he had to face them- had come to a crisis point. He needed God's blessing- a blessing that he had not tricked his way into but one that was fought for, that was his own. Even at this point Jacob does not seem to understand that God's blessing is a gift, given freely.

Yet it is also helpful to consider that this story is a very personal and specific one. It is about the long-standing relationship between God and Jacob, the frustrations that both parties must have felt as they pull in different directions, but the complete connection between them that means that one cannot let go of the other. God because God is God who cares for all humans yet has also chosen Jacob's family to share his light to the world. And Jacob because he is aware of the provision and protection that God has afforded him. This story suggests that a turning point has been reached between them and how it was resolved.

Daybreak brings a new name for Jacob, Israel- one who strives with God- an apt name in two meanings. Marking the wrestling contest between them and anticipating the aspiration to work with God. A name that would come to refer to the people of God. We leave this passage at a hopeful point, the sun has risen on Jacob aka Israel. Limping from his encounter, he crosses the river to rejoin his household and to meet with his estranged brother. Forever changed and yet still his unique self, who beheld the face of God and lived.

That determination to seek God's blessing is glimpsed throughout scripture. In the opening words of the gospel passage which leads to the feeding of the five thousand, we see a collective determination to seek Jesus- even to the point of entering the desert with no supplies and with seeming little awareness of or concern about how long they will have to wait. There is no wrestling match, but Jesus looks on them with compassion and responds to their requests for healing and teaching. Jesus then goes on to bless abundantly, far more than they had ever asked for or expected.

May we find the strength and the resilience to wrestle for God's blessing for ourselves as we are in this moment, and may we also be as determined in our wrestling for justice and peace in our world.

Amen

Hymn: STF 254 - [Seek ye first the kingdom of God. Lyric video \(StF 254\)](#)

- 1 Seek ye first the kingdom of God,
 and his righteousness,
 and all these things shall be added unto you;

 Allelu-, alleluia:
 Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia,
 allelu-, alleluia!
- 2 Ask, and it shall be given unto you;
 seek and ye shall find;
 knock, and the door shall be opened unto you;
 Allelu-, alleluia:
- 3 We shall not live by bread alone,
 but by every word
 that proceeds from the mouth of the Lord;
 Allelu-, alleluia:

Karen Lafferty (b. 1948)
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Prayers of intercession (adapted from Roots for Churches [Prayers](#))

Faithful God, amidst the complexities of our world, we pray for those wrestling with the difficult decisions they have to make and those struggling to do the right thing.

We pray for the leaders of the world, especially Andy Burnham in his early days in office as he builds relationships with other leaders and tackles urgent issues at home and abroad.

We pray for President Trump and the leaders of the Middle East; for all whose lives are impacted by his and their decisions; and for all who are suffering under corrupt or cruel regimes. Particularly we pray for those living in war zones, in places where there are few resources and great need - remembering Gaza, the Sudan and places where people live in constant fear...

Gracious God, keep us praying, so that all may know your blessing.

We pray for all those struggling to contain the devastating wildfires across Europe and around the world - for all in the emergency services, especially the fire fighters as they risk their lives day after day.

We remember those who have been killed and injured, for all who have seen their homes and livelihoods destroyed and for all the animals and wildlife decimated by the destruction of their habitats

Gracious God, keep us praying, so that all may know your blessing.

We pray for the rescue workers in south-west Japan and those killed and injured in the recent earthquake. We pray for all communities around the world who slip out of the news but who are struggling to rebuild their homes and their lives after extreme weather conditions...

Gracious God, keep us praying, so that all may know your blessing.

We pray for young people who have struggled with their exams and are now waiting for results. For all who are wrestling with decisions about their future.

We pray for safety for all children through the summer weeks especially those holidaying or living by water. We pray for life guards and all who have the responsibility of caring for young people and those who are vulnerable

Gracious God, keep us praying, so that all may know your blessing.

And finally we pray for all who are struggling physically, mentally or financially; wrestling with addictions and for those of us who feel alone and forgotten.

Gracious God, keep us praying, so that all may know your blessing.

Let us offer these prayers and those of our hearts as we pray the prayer that Jesus gave us, in a form or language that is the most helpful for you.

Our Father...

Hymn: STF 471 - [Lord, I Come to You \(The Power of Your Love\) \[with lyrics for congregations\]](#)

Lord I come to You
Let my heart be changed, renewed
Flowing from the grace
That I've found in You
Lord I've come to know
The weaknesses I see in me
Will be stripped away
By the power of Your love

*Hold me close
Let Your love surround me
Bring me near
Draw me to Your side
And as I wait
I'll rise up like the eagle
And I will soar with You
Your spirit leads me on
By the power of Your love*

Lord unveil my eyes
Let me see You face to face
The knowledge of Your love
As You live in me
Lord renew my mind

As Your will unfolds in my life
In living every day
By the power of Your love
Hold me close...(repeated)

Songwriters: Geoffrey William Bullock. For non-commercial use only.

A sending out prayer

Lord God,
we have chosen to follow you no matter how difficult the road.
Would you bless us now
so that we can face the next steps on our journey.
Amen.

Every blessing for the week ahead,

Rev Karen



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