

Night Visions

We don't often get to see people get what's coming to them-

but when we read about Jacob today, we think we just might.

He, you remember, is pretty much of a snake.

He's the one who took his twin brother's birthright –

and then, when their father was old and blind,

Jacob tricked him into giving him the blessing

that should have gone to his older brother, Esau.

Naturally, when Esau found out what happened he was furious-

and he planned to kill Jacob.

Rebekah, their mother, sent Jacob away to her brother for his safety-

and the family was split apart.

Twenty years go by and we come to today's story.

Jacob is going back to his own country after all these years

and after he's pretty much worn out his welcome with his father in law.

He's become rich- many possessions- wives- children- flocks- servants-

and he and all his entourage are traveling slowly toward his home country–

He realizes he's going to have to face Esau-

the twin brother he cheated all those years ago.

It seems he's finally going to have to face the music- to pay for what he's done.

He hears Esau is coming to meet him- so he makes preparations-

- sends off elaborate presents for Esau-

-divides his family and sends them one way-

-divides his flocks and herds and sends them in different directions

so maybe at least he can salvage something if there's a fight.

Finally, Jacob is left there, all by himself-

and we're told that a man wrestles with him till morning-

Jacob is not overcome- he demands a blessing-

the man strikes Jacob's hip - he's left with a limp-

His name is changed from *Jacob* to *Israel*-

He realizes he's been wrestling with God- there has been a transformation-

and we know him, Israel as the father of the 12 tribes of Israel.

Have you ever had one of those "Jacob" nights- all-night struggles?

When you didn't sleep- maybe out of fear- maybe anger- maybe grief-

maybe you're trying to forgive someone?

I remembered a story a friend told me- it happened years ago-

She had a new baby- and she lived in the south- near an air force base-

at the time of the Cuban Missile Crisis -would have been the fall of 1962.

Most of you may not remember that time

but it seemed there was a real possibility of armed conflict when

Russia began prepare to move missiles onto Cuban soil.

Our troops began to be moved to Florida.

**My friend said there was the constant sound of war planes flying overhead-
and there she was with a tiny, helpless infant.**

My friend was absolutely terrified-

**In her terror she lay awake all night- struggling with thoughts of war,
destruction- her baby-
-nightmarish thoughts of what could happen to them.**

She said to me- “I’m not sure what happened-

but just as it was beginning to get light-

it was as though I could breathe again-

I felt safe- I knew that we were all in God’s hands-

and that we could trust him.”

I think that’s a “Jacob night”-

My friend had struggled and she had met God.

Did she limp afterward?

In a sense she did- she *was* different- she had faced her fear

there was a loss of innocence-

But- in it’s place was the maturity of adulthood.

She had met God.

I think that’s what we can look forward to, too-

when we aren’t afraid to struggle with God.

We can honestly lay out our fears- our anger-

whatever it is that paralyzes us.

Don't be afraid to struggle with God-

You aren't going to win, of course- but do you want to.

What we really want- in our depths- is to know that God is real-

God is merciful- and that we're safe in Him.

After a Jacob night, you will know that- I can guarantee you of that.

Amen.