

## Sermon – Sunday 19<sup>th</sup> October 2025

### OLD TESTAMENT READING: Genesis 32, 22-31

#### *Jacob wrestles with God and receives a blessing*

<sup>22</sup> That night Jacob got up and took his two wives, his two female servants and his eleven sons and crossed the ford of the Jabbok. <sup>23</sup> After he had sent them across the stream, he sent over all his possessions. <sup>24</sup> So Jacob was left alone, and a man wrestled with him till daybreak. <sup>25</sup> When 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. <sup>26</sup> Then the man said, *"Let me go, for it is daybreak."*

But Jacob replied,

*"I will not let you go unless you bless me."*

<sup>27</sup> The man asked him, "What is your name?"

*"Jacob,"* he answered.

<sup>28</sup> Then the man said,

*"Your name will no longer be Jacob, but Israel, because you have struggled with God and with humans and have overcome."*

<sup>29</sup> Jacob said, *"Please tell me your name."*

But he replied,

*"Why do you ask my name?"*

Then he blessed him there.

<sup>30</sup> So Jacob called the place Peniel,<sup>[a]</sup> saying,

*"It is because I saw God face to face, and yet my life was spared."*

<sup>31</sup> The sun rose above him as he passed Peniel, and he was limping because of his hip.

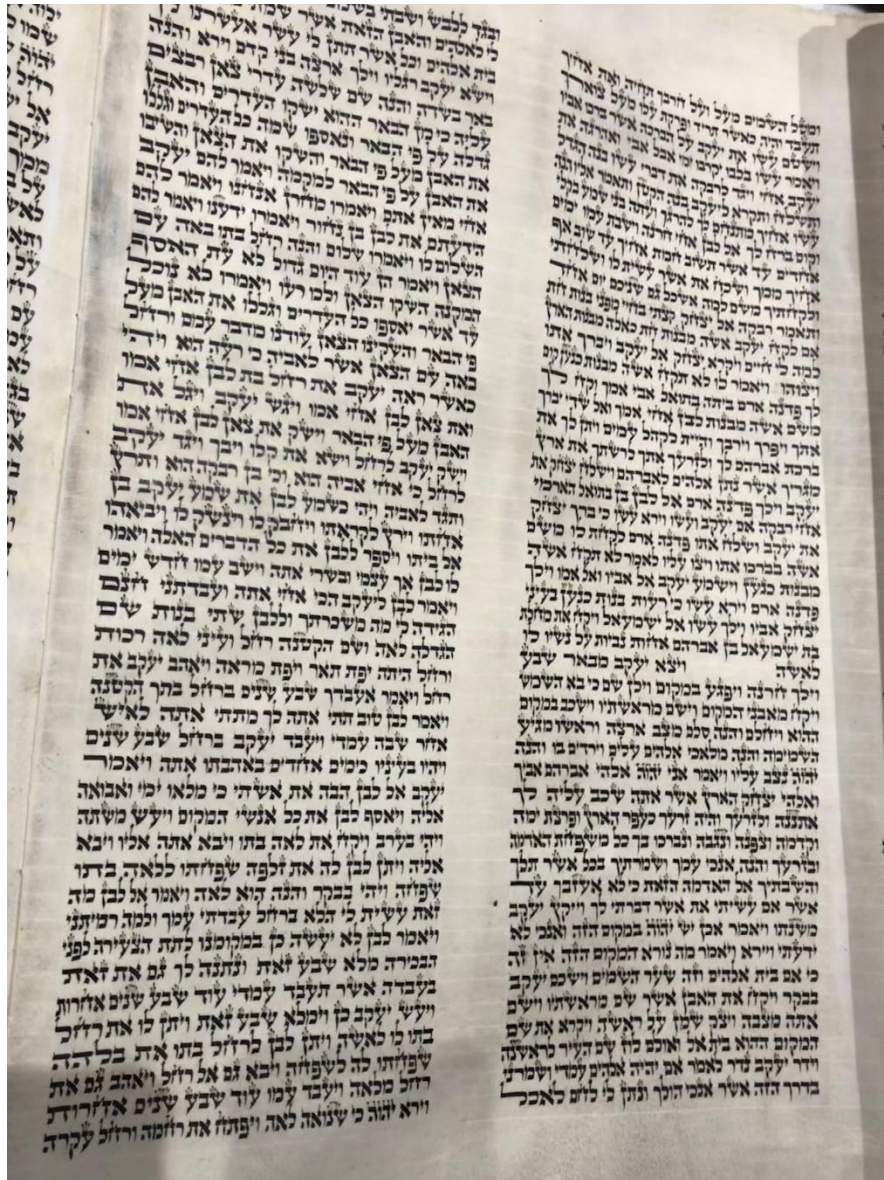
### GOSPEL READING: Luke 18. 1-8

<sup>18</sup> Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up. <sup>2</sup> He said: "In a certain town there was a judge who neither feared God nor cared what people thought. <sup>3</sup> And there was a widow in that town who kept coming to him with the plea, 'Grant me justice against my adversary.'

<sup>4</sup> "For some time he refused. But finally he said to himself, 'Even though I don't fear God or care what people think, <sup>5</sup> yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will see that she gets justice, so that she won't eventually come and attack me!'"

<sup>6</sup> And the Lord said, "Listen to what the unjust judge says. <sup>7</sup> And will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones, who cry out to him day and night? Will he keep putting them off? <sup>8</sup> I tell you, he will see that they get justice, and quickly. However, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?"

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Before we look at the scriptures, I just thought I would share with you a little bit about my week.

Some of you will know I have a friend who is a Rabbi and she leads the Harlow Jewish Community and it was a great honour for me that she came to my ordination at the cathedral.

We do a lot of interfaith work together and on Monday she invited me to the ceremony of *Simchat* the re-rolling the Torah Scroll the start of the new Jewish calendar year following Yom Kippur.

As part of their weekly synagogue worship, they read through the first five books of the Bible over the course of the year and when they get to the end they wind it back to the start (*which is quite a task as it would probably go round this church at least a couple of times*) but then they start again in Genesis. Anyway, as we had Genesis 32 open, I took this picture – which I just thought I would share so that everyone could see what the Jacob reading looks like written in Hebrew. I believe the chapter starts at the gap and it reads backwards for us.

As part of the Monday night service the scrolls were processed around the congregation and we had follow it, continuing to face it like you might sometimes see when the Gospel is processed in a High Church tradition. And I felt greatly privileged when I was asked if I would carry one of the scrolls too. It felt like a real blessing on our relationship.

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And that is partly because it is a friendship that came out of my “wrestling” with a couple of members of her synagogue. I had upset them by running an Easter Egg hunt which passed outside their house one year when our Holy Week and Passover had totally overlapped. It started a conversation about the similarities in our faiths and a working relationship had struck up from there.

I saw that same couple on Monday night and we laughed and said if only all disagreements could end so well. Which left me reflecting on the fact that it had because we had all been persistent in wanting our relationships as religious leaders to be strong, and we had prayed about it.

I also spent a day with interfaith leaders in Luton yesterday and in particular with one of the Imams at the mosque. As a group we discussed the commonalities in our beliefs: that Mary & Jesus are mentioned in the Koran and that we are aligned as Abrahamic faiths: all believing in one God and called to serve our communities.

And as I reflected on those two encounters this week and then on these two passages, it underlined for me the need to continue to wrestle with some of the challenges that I have felt here in our communities in Hertfordshire with some of the flag raising sentiments of the last few months and it has spurred me on to continue to persist and persevere in prayer.

And returning to our readings today it occurred me that the fight for justice is Sacred

We all know there are global and local struggles for justice—the longing for peace in the Middle East and the right to worship freely in our own communities in the UK.

But there are many other injustices too: poverty, illness, crime, human rights. All things worth fighting for.

It would be very easy to read the passage of wrestling with God as REBELLION, but I think it is actually about relationship building & strengthening.

And if we consider it as a sacred struggle (which is shared across faith traditions) against injustice, then when we persist it is TRANSFORMATIVE.

If we look at Jacob’s struggle first, we see this transition. Jacob wrestles all night, not for dominance, but for blessing. And he emerges wounded yet renamed. His limp becomes a mark of encounter, like a scar but NOT a mark of defeat. A reminder that transformation often comes through struggle.

We only have to look at the news to know that many countries bear the marks of conflict at the moment, and yet they are still seek blessing and peace. Which we pray holds in Israel & Palestine.

What I love about this passage is that it highlights that God doesn’t reject a struggler – he meets them in the fight and that blessing doesn’t come without work but through persistence and honesty.

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And so it made me wonder: What are we all struggling with today as we sit here? What injustices, fears of our own, or identities are we bringing into our own fights in the night?

And how do we honour the wounds of others?

Some questions we can reflect on further in our home group conversations perhaps?

Then there is the Widow's Persistence: a parable demonstrating that justice demands ENDURANCE.

The widow confronts an unjust system with nothing but her voice and resolve. Too poor to influence the judge financially she approaches him with the only weapon she's got: dogged persistence that will wear him down to the point of giving her justice out of sheer desperation to get her to stop pestering him.

Her persistence echoes the cries of those denied justice—whether in courts, borders, or places of worship. And Jesus says if we persist in our prayers to God how much more quickly will he respond with Justice.

Jesus affirms the widows persistence, not just as admirable but as faithful. And it just reminds me that God always hears our petitions.

There is also something here about hope that doesn't let go. Both Jacob and the widow refuse to let go until something changes. Their stories show that hope is not passive—it's active, gritty, and sometimes painful.

It also tells us that God honours those who hold on, who cry out, who demand blessing & justice.

What does it mean to hope in a God who invites us to wrestle with challenges, to persist, to speak up? How can we apply this in our lives?

Well, hopefully we can be encouraged to be persistent in our prayers for the world and our communities and for our brothers and sisters of all faiths, knowing that God does hear & will answer.

But also I hope that it will encourage us to see that our own personal struggles – they are not signs of failure, but sacred engagement.

And for those who might be living with chronic pain, disability, or feel constrained by systemic injustice: be affirmed that your daily fight is seen and your persistence is holy.

So, to conclude I just hope that we may always be a church that is persistent in prayer especially for injustice and I'd ask you to join me in prayer now.

*Loving God we ask for your blessing on all those who wrestle, those who persist, and those who refuse to give up hope. We pray that you would equip them with strength & courage, and may they know your presence in every struggle.*

*Amen.*