**Oratio, Metitatio, Tentatio**

Based on [Genesis 32:22-32](https://biblia.com/books/esv/Ge32.22-32)

Preached on March 4, 2020

Lenten Midweek 1

Pastor Nathan Fuehrer

The story of Jacob wrestling with God is one of the most perplexing accounts in all of scripture. It’s not perplexing because it is particularly difficult to understand what happened. We know it happened literally and historically that Jacob wrestled with God, probably the Son of God before he became man, and walked away with an injured hip and a blessing. We know that that is how the nation of Israel got its name.

What’s perplexing to me is that, it appears that God gives Jacob a direct command, “Let me go”. And Jacob refused. And in the end, God blessed Jacob. This is the only place in the entire scripture, that I know of, where someone is rewarded for disobeying God’s command. And it seems as though God wanted him to disobey.

At any rate, even if that happened, it is descriptive not prescriptive. No one should use this passage to doubt the sincerity of God’s commands. Jesus says, “If you love me you will obey my commands.” Etc.

Rather, this text is useful for us today because it is a wonderful text in which the Holy Spirit teaches us that we are to struggle with God. And this is a metaphor for the three christian disciplines that are especially relevant in lent. Martin Luther wrote about them using their latin form Oratio, Metatatio, and Tentatio. They are prayer, meditiation, and suffering.

First, prayer is a struggle with God. It is tempting for us not to pray, because God already knows what we need before we ask him. But he commands us to pray constantly. He wants us to ask him for his gifts. And sometimes, with specific requests. And sometimes he appears not to answer prayers, or grant our requests. And this can be cause for doubt. But that is part of the struggle that is intended for our good, that we can see more clearly, and cling more firmly to his promises. You can ask for God to grant you a new job, or a more peaceful life, and he might grant it, or, knowing better than you what you need, he might not. But things he has promised to give you, he will. And you can remember his promise of grace and mercy through Jesus Christ. You can remember his promise to work all things for your good. And you can rejoice in the things that the devil, the world, and your sin cannot deprive you of. Prayer can be a struggle, but God blesses those who persevere.

Second, meditation is a struggle with God. It is not the type of meditation most commonly thought of, emptying your mind, or being conscious of your feelings. By, meditation, Martin Luther means studying God’s word, and considering it. It is a sort of mindfulness of God’s word. Not letting his word roll off you, like water off of a duck’s back. Rather considering it over and over again. When you read the psalms, you can see what is meant by such meditation. David writes about meditating on God’s word day and night.

Meditation is a struggle, because it is easy for us to simply let go of God’s Word, to not consider it, or not reflect upon it. But Jacob is our example for it. We are to hold on to God’s word and refuse to let it go, even when the struggle is long. It is very difficult to be mindful of God’s word while simultaneously being in the world that has a different operating system entirely. We see the mighty conquer in the world, but in the word it is the meek who inherit the kingdom. In the world money is the surest way to get what you want, in the word you can’t buy the gift of God with money, nor can you take it with you when you die. In the world, the dead have no hope. In the word, death is not the end, and so life is in many ways a preparation for it. These profound truths, taught by God in scripture, we meditate upon and struggle with.

Third, suffering is a type of struggling with God. This is the least attractive to the flesh. Nobody likes to suffer. Even Jesus prayed that God would take his cross away, and Paul prayed against his thorn in the flesh. But God sends us crosses and bids us take them up. We shouldn’t invent new sufferings in the hopes of pleasing God by our asceticism. Lenten fasting, for instance, is not undertaken to please God. It is instead taken on for the sake of self discipline, and keeping the flesh in check. If we indulge too much too often, it becomes more difficult for us to suffer want. So we can prepare for the sufferings God sends to us, but practicing our will and restraint in little ways.

In any case, it is a struggle to believe that the sufferings we must undergo are really meant for our good or for God’s purposes which are always right. There is a whole book of the bible dedicated to struggling with God in suffering. The book of Job. But we are to learn from Jacob that, when God would have us suffer we should hold on even more tightly to him, even as Jacob, when God put his hip out of joint as they wrestled, did not let go of God, but persisted.

I don’t know how to resolve the idea that God told Jacob to do something, and blessed him for not doing it. Maybe it’s not as perplexing of a situation as I think. But the message is clear, God wants us to struggle with him, and not to give up. So pray without ceasing, Meditate day and night on the word, and suffer in faith knowing that God’s power is made perfect in weakness, and as a disciple of Christ, when you are weak, then you are strong.