

Many of you know the story of Jacob; twenty years before the incident in today's reading Jacob had fled his father's home; he had to go with nothing in his hands; what he had was a stolen birthright from his brother, Esau.

I don't know about you; to me, Jacob is the last person I would teach my children to take after; he was not a good example for your children to follow. Jacob deceived his father and brother; and when he went to his uncle's home he did the same thing.

In fact, his uncle Laban was also not a good man; he took advantage of Jacob who fell in love with Rachel, one of his daughters. Knowing that Jacob liked Rachel, Laban promised that he would give her to him if he were to work for him for seven years. Jacob did it; but the woman he was given was not Rachel; it was her sister Leah. Jacob had to work another seven years to marry the woman he wanted. That means he had to work for 14 years. That was amazing!

But Jacob didn't lose anything there; in fact he became rich by way of cheating and fighting with his uncle/father-in-law there.

Now after twenty years Jacob had to leave there, taking with him all wives, children, servants, and livestock that he had earned.

Jacob then went on his way home; he was heading home; then where was his home? Who was going to welcome him at home? No One.

That was the problem. It didn't take long for Jacob to hear

that his brother, Esau, was coming that way: the very brother whom he had cheated out of his birthright. What scared Jacob was that there were 400 men with his brother. It was not good news at all.

Jacob was afraid. And we don't know exactly what happened. What we know is that he was there alone; all the people and animals went across the river called Jabbok. And then night fell. Jacob was there by himself. Then the text says, “A man wrestled with Jacob till daybreak.”

They were fighting and the fighting went on all night. And the man had to go because the sun was about to rise. He eventually wounded Jacob in the hip, but Jacob still would not let go.

Many of you know this story; we know what happened later too. Jacob asked for a blessing from this man and he got what he wanted. God gave Jacob a blessing he didn't deserve; it was a gift that was given to him by God.

But what intrigued me was the question Jacob was asked:

The man asked Jacob, “What is your name?” Wait a minute. Did he really not know what Jacob's name was? Did the man of God not know who he was wrestling with? Of course, he did. How could he not know? Then what is this?

I think this is more of an existential question that is asked of us all, rather than of the man called Jacob of 3000 years ago.

One way or another we are dealing with this issue of naming ourselves in our spiritual journey;

I don't know about you but for me this has been a very important practice as a Christian. I often ask myself, “hey, who are you? What are you doing? What is your name?”

I know you have a name but what is your real name, the name you want to live up to?

We all have hopes and dreams no matter how old we are; we live because we are worth something. Your name is not just a name but something that represents not only who you are but also what you want to be. What is it that you want to be? Where would you like to go from here and now? What is your name? What do you think God wants you to be?

God did not want Jacob to remain Jacob, the deceiver. God wanted him to be Israel, meaning “God persevere.”

Then what is your name? What would you want to be? What do you think God wants you to be? Or what do you think God sent you to this world for? I think there is a good reason for all of us to be here.

In a way, life is a journey in which we continue to wrestle with this issue. The bottom line is that we may not be able to figure that out as clearly as we want it to be. But one thing is clear: God wants life to be a blessing: a blessing to ourselves, others, and God himself.

When Jacob, the deceiver, asked for a blessing, God didn't mind giving it to him even though he was not the best person in the world. God was happy to give Jacob a new name, new possibility, and new future; God gave him a second chance.

The interesting thing was that Jacob also asked the man the same question, “What is your name?” Jacob knew he was God; but he asked it anyway; and surprisingly God did not give Jacob his name. That means God could not be named; God could not be contained in one name; God is too big to have one name; that means, God is mystery, meaning we do not fully understand Him.

Many times we wander around thinking the God I know doesn't even exist. It is normal to think that way; but God is bigger than we think He is. He always has more to offer us than we think he would. His love is immeasurable; his mercy is beyond our imagination.

One aspect of God's love is shown in today's Matthew text. In the text, Jesus shows his compassion for the crowd, the nameless, who are hungry and sick. It did not matter who they were and where they came from; he welcomed and showed his love to them. And those who were hungry were all fed; those who were sick were all healed.

Sometimes we don't know our names. We are part of this nameless crowd. We lose a clear sense of who we are and where we are in our journey. But it is ok that we sometime don't know all that. God knows us. We sometimes wonder about not only who we are but also why things are the way they are.

We do not have all the answers. But that is ok; God understands us.

The main thing is God loves us and wants to give a new name,

new direction, new awakening, new learning, new spirit, new energy to those who earnestly come and ask Him for a blessing, just like He did to Jacob.

So my invitation to you is that you come to God and show your feelings and wrestle with Him.

May God bless you with a clear sense of who you are and whose you are.

Amen.