

“Written on Your Heart”

Have you ever wondered where you stand with God? Have you in vulnerable times, times of stress and challenge, or times of unaccountable bliss wondered where God is in your life? How did you feel in those moments?

Some people are very certain of their relationship and it has never wavered. I congratulate them and I pray that they never have to experience the distance or disconnect that others have. For others of us we have struggled mightily like Jacob wrestling with the angel on the riverside at the place Jacob would name *Penuel* or Face of God. Jacob whose name that night was changed to Israel which means “wrestles with God” may have struggled that one night, but for others it is a lifelong struggle. Sometimes the struggle seems to be playful like two dogs having a friendly tussle. Other times it seems like a tooth and nail cat fight with snarling, hissing, tumbling and fur flying.

The former is the fun kind of struggle we have when we are studying the word of God. We are seeking out meaning and trying to discern where we fit within the scheme of things. We wrestle intellectually with scriptures and what they are saying to us in our current context. Even though we know that they were written at least two thousand years ago, we are certain that they are timeless and that they speak to us in the present as profoundly as they ever have.

Within this kind of struggle there is our sense of yearning to know God and know God’s hopes and directions for us. We sense God’s love and care is as close as that of a loving mother or father who desires nothing but the best for their child. Our sense of longing may be so strong that we may not realize that God’s desire for us is even more profound than ours for God.

When it is even more obscured is when we are in a rough and tumble struggle with the Lord, much like Jacob experienced that night long ago. The struggle may be only for a nighttime or it may go on for days, months, or years. I think of John of the Cross who wrote so eloquently of the *Dark Night of the Soul*. There is our contemporary, St. Teresa of Calcutta, whose writings revealed that for many, many years she prayed to God and God seemed to be silent. She gave her life to God through working with the poor and dying of Calcutta. She labored on even as she struggled to know why God remained silent. Loved and admired by so many and yet her struggle with God was unimaginable to all but her.

I also am aware of those who are not known as capital S saints. I think of those saints who have labored on through the pandemic and political and social turmoil of recent years. These saints have held together nonprofits that serve the marginalized, the hungry, the environment, war ravaged countries, and so many more. Their efforts have been tiring yet so many have forged ahead as if they were tireless. They have looked outward while so much of the world turned inward. These are the people who run toward the sounds of

gunfire and explosions seeking to help while others run away seeking only to protect their own lives. There is a struggle there too and a very lonely one as they seek God in the devastation of broken lives and people trying to keep body and soul together. When they have a moment of peace from their demanding labors they must struggle with where God is in all of it.

This latter kind of struggling can leave us weary, cynical, hurting, and lost like a child in a crowd. We feel abandoned by the security we had relied upon. We feel surrounded by strangeness and confusion. We cannot see a way out. I expect those Israelites exiled in Jeremiah's time must have felt similarly. They cry out in Psalm 137 "How shall we sing the Lord's song in a strange land?"¹ It is a good question when our hearts and spirits are tired and seem defeated. When we feel like our struggle has left us with nothing. How can we sing our song?

Yet Jeremiah assures us that even as we struggle God is making something new in us. Through Jeremiah YHWH says, "I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. No longer shall they teach one another, or say to each other, 'Know the LORD,' for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the LORD; for I will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sin no more."

We may think that we have to be like Jacob and struggle to know God. We may feel as St. Teresa did that we are distant from the Lord. We may experience a sense of yearning that seems to go unfulfilled as we strive to be one with God. Indeed, that struggle, distance and striving is all part of the relationship. But we can be reassured that God is actually not so far away. God is within us and God's teaching has been written upon each of our hearts. It is there. We must remember that oftentimes it is what is closest to us that is hardest to see.

The Word of God is very near to each us it is in our mouths and in our hearts.² It is ours for the taking if we relent from our striving and wrangling and settle into it. It is there to guide us, comfort us, restore us, and make us into the person God wants us to be. We are already known by the Lord. Like that child lost in the crowd when we recognize the familiar face and are scooped up into the arms of the searching parent we know the struggle and the search are over. For with all our heart we know we are home.

¹ Psalm 137:4 King James Version

² Paraphrase of Deuteronomy 30:14