

Wednesday May 13 <sup>th</sup>	Genesis 32	<b>56 How good it is to thank you, Lord [Ps 92]</b>
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*Today's hymn is a version of Psalm 92 v.1-4.*

- 1 How good it is to thank you, Lord,  
proclaim your name, most High ;  
to praise your faithfulness at dawn,  
your love when night is nigh ;
- 2 And on a ten-stringed instrument,  
and with a harp's sweet sound,  
and with the music of the lute  
to make your praise abound.
- 3 For all your actions make me glad,  
your works inspire my praise :  
I sing for joy with my whole heart  
today, and all my days.

Here it is to the tune *St Fulbert*:

<https://music.churchofscotland.org.uk/search?keywords=56>

This is the tune played on organ:

<https://hymnary.org/media/fetch/182735>

The Psalm's heading tells us it's for the Sabbath, and how appropriate, because it starts with a call to worship God from morning till night The Psalm begins and ends with God. Praise to God is accompanied by the strings section of the psalmist's orchestra, an echo of Psalm 150 where the whole orchestra is playing! The 'harp' or 'lyre' also reminds us of the young David playing music to soothe Saul's mind (1 Samuel 16:23). God is to be praised because of his great works, by which is meant the creation.

The rest of the psalm (v.5-15) remind us that unspiritual people don't realise this. However, good people are compared to a flourishing tree, like the tree in Psalm 1:3.

*Today's reading is **Genesis 32***

*Jacob also went on his way, and the angels of God met him.*

*When Jacob saw them, he said, 'This is the camp of God!' So he named that place Mahanaim.*

*Jacob sent messengers ahead of him to his brother Esau in the land of Seir, the country of Edom. He instructed them: 'This is what you are to say to my lord Esau: "Your servant Jacob says, I have been staying with Laban and have remained there till now. I have cattle and donkeys, sheep and goats, male and female servants. Now I am sending this message to my lord, that I may find favour in your eyes."' When the messengers returned to Jacob, they said, 'We went to your brother Esau, and now he is coming to meet you, and four hundred men are with him.'*

*In great fear and distress Jacob divided the people who were with him into two groups, and the flocks and herds and camels as well. He thought, 'If Esau comes and attacks one group, the group that is left may escape.'*

*Then Jacob prayed, 'O God of my father Abraham, God of my father Isaac, Lord, you who said to me, "Go back to your country and your relatives, and I will make you prosper," I am unworthy of all the kindness and faithfulness you have shown your servant. I had only my staff when I crossed this Jordan, but now I have become two camps. Save me, I pray, from the hand of my brother Esau, for I am afraid he will come and attack me, and also the mothers with their children. But you have said, "I will surely make you prosper and will make your descendants like the sand of the sea, which cannot be counted."'*

*He spent the night there, and from what he had with him he selected a gift for his brother Esau: two hundred female goats and twenty male goats, two hundred ewes and twenty rams, thirty female camels with their young, forty cows and*

ten bulls, and twenty female donkeys and ten male donkeys. He put them in the care of his servants, each herd by itself, and said to his servants, 'Go ahead of me, and keep some space between the herds.'

He instructed the one in the lead: 'When my brother Esau meets you and asks, "Who do you belong to, and where are you going, and who owns all these animals in front of you?" then you are to say, "They belong to your servant Jacob. They are a gift sent to my lord Esau, and he is coming behind us."'

He also instructed the second, the third and all the others who followed the herds: 'You are to say the same thing to Esau when you meet him. And be sure to say, "Your servant Jacob is coming behind us.'" For he thought, 'I will pacify him with these gifts I am sending on ahead; later, when I see him, perhaps he will receive me.' So Jacob's gifts went on ahead of him, but he himself spent the night in the camp. 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. After he had sent them across the stream, he sent over all his possessions. So Jacob was left alone, and a man wrestled with him till daybreak. 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. Then the man said, 'Let me go, for it is daybreak.' But Jacob replied, 'I will not let you go unless you bless me.' The man asked him, 'What is your name?' 'Jacob,' he answered. 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.' Jacob said, 'Please tell me your name.' But he replied, 'Why

*do you ask my name?' Then he blessed him there.*

*So Jacob called the place Peniel, saying, 'It is because I saw God face to face, and yet my life was spared.'*

*The sun rose above him as he passed Peniel, and he was limping because of his hip. Therefore to this day the Israelites do not eat the tendon attached to the socket of the hip, because the socket of Jacob's hip was touched near the tendon.*

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Day of Reckoning.

After 20 years as an exile in Haran (Mesopotamia), Jacob makes his way back to Canaan an older and much richer man. But is he any wiser? He's certainly full of his old skilful cunning. Knowing that sooner or later he must meet his brother Esau, whom he had defrauded, he plays his best hand. Dividing his 'caravan' into two, he splits the odds, and he also sends advance parties with gifts for Esau, a softening-up process!

Meanwhile, he had an encounter with God. An appearance of angels reminds him that he is once again entering the 'holy land'. Hearing that Esau is approaching with 400 men, Jacob prays to God, earnestly asking his favour; and also taking the chance to remind God of the promises God had previously made to him!

Then comes the famous incident of Jacob wrestling with God. Sending his family ahead of him, he spends the night at the Jabbok ford, and wrestles with a 'man' until daybreak, from which he emerges blessed, but crippled. He sees God's face ('Peniel').

What are we to make of this?

The sheer persistence of Jacob is audacious, and admirable;

not letting his adversary go without receiving a blessing. This is often compared to the boldness of prayer which Abraham his grandfather had shown (Genesis 18:27). Jesus also commends this attitude, eg in the parable of the persistent widow (Luke 18:1).

He's given a new name, replacing Jacob ('supplanter') by Israel ('struggler, fighter, contender'). This was not only to be his own name, but that of his people forever. In the Bible, a new name also signifies a changed person (eg Simon becoming Peter, or Saul becoming Paul). His life and that of his descendants would be a story of struggle for generations to come, even up to the present day.

And his injury? He would bear the scars of that incident all his life, a permanent reminder of his struggle with God. Like Harry Potter's scar, or Frodo's wound, it would never completely heal. He would forever be 'the wounded healer'.

We all live with the 'scars' of our past experiences; sometimes physical ones but more often mental or psychological ones. That does not mean we can't help in the healing of other people, in fact it's very often one of the prerequisites of doing so.

Charles Wesley wrote a wonderful hymn inspired by this incident: '*Come O thou traveller unknown*' (I remember singing it in church many years ago). In the hymn, the identity of Jacob's adversary is gradually revealed to him as Love. The last line is 'Thy nature, and Thy name is Love'.

Wesley's original had 14 verses! Here is the London Metropolitan Tabernacle singing just five of them (with words):

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vaWZWifBkA>

Maddy Prior (of 'Steeleye Span') has a folk version:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Sz7pG6vLmIY>

## Prayer for Christian Aid Week

*This prayer is from Christian Aid, based on the Hymn, How Great Thou Art*

Our souls sing out a joyful song,  
Our souls sing out how great Thou art.  
We consider the works You have made  
The stars of the night, the leaves of the trees  
The birds of the air the oceans and streams.

Our souls sing out a mournful song,  
Our souls grieve before our God.  
We consider the works our hands have made;  
The warming of the planet, the rising of seas  
The wilting of the harvest, devastating communities.

Our souls sing out a contrite song  
Our souls bow down low.  
We regret the works our hands have made  
The impact on the poorest, the livelihoods lost  
The deepening of poverty,  
the environmental and human cost.

Our souls sing out a penitent song,  
Our souls turn back to what is right.  
We consider the good works our hands can make;  
The words of justice we can speak,  
the acts of love we can give  
The hand of solidarity we can extend,  
for others to fully live.

Our souls sing out a hopeful song  
Our souls look to the Lord, where our hope comes from  
We consider the works you call us to;  
The love of our neighbour, the stewardship of the earth

The flourishing of all creation, the wonder of its worth.  
In Jesus' name we pray,  
**Amen**