

What a Struggle! ~ July 20, 2008

Genesis 28:10-19a; Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43; Isaiah 44:6-8

All of us, as we travel through life, struggle from time to time. I have known few people who have not, although there is an occasional person who will tell me they have never had a difficult time. I find this surprising, especially after I have learned a little about such a person's life. Often there have been struggles and either someone else handled the problems or, the person who believed there were none, was simply totally unaware.

Our struggles are as different as we are. Some people battle with health problems, others financial troubles, others with relationship issues. Some of us, in our most reflective moments, even struggle with God. We try to define and redefine what God is in our rapidly changing world. We wonder where God is and why it seems our prayers are not answered. This struggle to understand and comprehend the nature of God did not originate with us. The stories in our Bible reveal that people in early history and at a far simpler time of life also took a while to grasp what their God was all about.

Jacob caught a better glimpse of God in a dream. We are often told that dreams come about when we are at rest and that they help us process what is going on in our daily lives. I've had a few doozies lately that I am trying to decipher. Eventually, I know that all that is seen dimly now will be seen more clearly. Jacob's dream was reassuring for him. In spite of the underhanded things he had done to secure his brother's birthright, God spoke to Jacob in his dream telling him that he was special and that God would be with him, always. A bit later in the story Jacob has an actual physical struggle with God to further convince him of God's presence with him and God's strength.

One would think that, following such episodes with God, Jacob would straighten up and behave himself. But, he never quite did. He might appear to be moving along on a proper path when something would happen to cause him to revert to his old ways.

But we know how that is. We can decide to live a better life and be moving along quite well, when something pops up to thwart our progress. That is human nature.

Growing into a better understanding of the way God works in us and through us can be seen in the struggle between the wheat and the weeds. If we believe that we are to live lives patterned on the life of Jesus and we try to do so, we find that we are the good seed that has been sowed in the field. We mind our own business, make sure that we "do unto others as we would have them do unto us," refrain from being arrogant and judgmental, realizing all of God's people are equally good and people of worth, develop patience and understanding, and grow to "love our neighbors as ourselves." But those weeds keep popping up reminding us that life is so much easier if we decide to place ourselves ahead of and above others.

As the wind blows through our fields of growth, the weeds whisper to us that it is important to be perceived as the best and the smartest. It is important to work through life to acquire things because, as we all know, the one who ends up with the most toys when he or she dies wins the game.

When we find ourselves caught in such thoughts, we need to remember that life is never a game to be won, it is a process to be lived. It should be a time when we try to become all we can become in the best ways. As we all have heard, the joy is not in the

destination we finally come to, it is in the journey. The parable tells us that the good and the bad grow together but the bad will eventually come to some sort of justice.

The journey may be hard and we may struggle but it is the way we grow while resisting the weeds that matters. Very often the way we grow depends on the way we choose to see things and life around us.

Recently I received a little story via the Internet that reminds us to see things in the right light.

“ The eye doctor instructed her patient to read a chart on the wall. He looked at it and read, ‘A, B, F, N, L and G.’

The doctor turned the light back on and wrote in her notebook.

’How'd I do, Doc?’ the patient wondered.

She replied, ‘Let's put it this way -- they're numbers.’

’But Doc,’ he argued, ‘this is the way I see it!’

Much of our happiness or unhappiness is a result of our perception. ‘This is the way I see it,’ we tell ourselves.

We see some problems as challenges that energize us to action and others as obstacles that stop further progress. It's just the way we see it. And sometimes we see new situations as fun, and other times we see them as fearful.

The busyness of our lives can be OK if we see it that way, or it can be a major source of stress and struggle. And an unexpected intrusion in our schedules can be an irritant or, if we see it that way, possibly the most important thing we could do that day. Even an embarrassing mistake can be the beginning of a new learning or an occasion to berate ourselves. It's in the way we see it.

One of the greatest blocks to our happiness is forgetting that it is not always about what is happening to us -- it's more about the way we see it [and choose to handle it].

As Marcel Proust said, ‘The real voyage of discovery lies not in seeking new landscapes, but in having new eyes.’ It's all in the way we see it. (Today's message -- THE WAY WE SEE IT -- This is YOUR LIFE SUPPORT SYSTEM, a free newsletter sharing life, love and laughter, published by Steve Goodier.

<http://www.lifesupportsystem.com>)

Jacob chose to see his situation in a new way that came to him through a dream. We all need to become more alert to the presence of God that permeates our lives and sustains us through all struggles. It is never too late for us to find a new way of seeing and being.

-- Amen