

*“Filled with Deliciousness”*

*Genesis 32:22-31; Matthew 14:13-21*

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“Filled with Deliciousness” is the title of this message because these scriptures are filled with deliciousness. And life, life, is filled with deliciousness if we have the faith to see it so.

That’s the message, and I could stop there (and some of you might like it if I did) but it wouldn’t be much of a sermon. So let’s first establish that there are different forms of deliciousness. The 5,000 men, (along with even more women and children) that were fed by the miracle of the loaves and fishes, were filled with delicious food.

They, and we, are also filled with the deliciousness of this story’s possibilities in the face of adversity. Remember the narrative: this miracle occurs right after the beheading of John the Baptist! Jesus’ cousin, the one who foretold the coming of Messiah, is now dead. When Jesus receives word he withdraws to a deserted place. But there is no escaping human need. So despite his own need for comfort, Jesus throws himself into the comfort needs of others. The text said “he had compassion for them.” Remember the word compassion means “to suffer with.” The deliciousness with which we are filled by Jesus’ response is that even in our darkest hour there is a place and a time and an inner strength that allows us to reach to others.

What kind of miracle was this? I don’t know. That, too, is part of the deliciousness of the text. Did the five loaves and two fishes miraculously multiply? Did the symbols of bread and fish, lifted up for blessing in front of an immense crowd, inspire those who had brought food to share? I don’t know. What I **DO** know is that the perception of scarcity was turned upside down by the power of faith, and delicious abundance prevailed. So much abundance that, after 5,000 men, plus women and children were fed, 12 baskets of food remained. Twelve baskets. 12 disciples. A coincidental response to the twelve who told Jesus “send the people away?” I don’t think so!

As you know, we are nearly ready to bring to you the proposal for the handicapped accessible renovation of our Wesley Center. This opportunity to expand our welcome and hospitality to include all without regard to mobility issues is exciting; and its' construction cost will be valued in the hundreds of thousands of dollars! How many? Come on August 24<sup>th</sup> to receive our report! The point for this story is that we can do this! There is a delicious excitement in taking on something great for God and God's people; and there is a delicious joy in faith that declares "We will take what we know and, in faith, call on God and God's people for the resources we need."

The Jacob story from Genesis is also filled with deliciousness. Let me first tell you that a part of the deliciousness is, for me, very personal. This text was my first public sermon outside my home church, preached at my late uncle's church in New Jersey in 1975 with my sainted mother and father among the worshippers. It is also delicious because it was a very bad sermon. Or at least a very long one. What I remember my mother saying is "Just at the point when I thought 'You should move on, Brian,' you did." Ouch! I promise to spare you that today.

The deliciousness of the Jacob story is that he is finally forced to wrestle with his demons. I think I'm not unusual feeling, when a scalawag continues to escape and prosper despite his misdeeds, that I want him to get his come-uppance. In this wrestling story at the Jabbock River with a stranger in the night, that is exactly what happens.

Remember how he got there: Genesis 26-32 if you'd like to read it. Jacob bargained his older brother Esau out of his birthright, cheated him out of his father's blessing, and ran away from Esau's murderous anger. Jacob then goes to his uncle Laban where, over 20 years, he prospers; despite having an uncle as deceptive as he is. His prosperity includes two wives, maids, children, grandchildren, flocks, camels. He becomes so prosperous that Laban and his children feel that it has been at their expense. So Jacob flees again. After being caught by Laban, they negotiate a truce codified in the so-called "Mizpah blessing:" *"The Lord watch between me and thee, while we are absent, one from another."*

This blessing is not, as we often think, the sweet equivalent of “God be with you ‘til we meet again.” It is more, “God is watching you when I can’t, because I don’t trust you as far as I can throw you.”

So having negotiated this truce, and been told by God to return to his homeland, Jacob now has to face his brother Esau. Delicious! After sending three contingents of presents (in the form of lambs and milk goats) ahead of him to essentially bribe Esau, Jacob is alone in camp when we come to today’s reading of wrestling with the nocturnal stranger.

Was it God? An angel? The text doesn’t say. What we know is that we call them “nightmares” for a reason. That 3 a.m. never looks like 3 p.m. And that, at some point, all of us wrestle with one writer called “the dark night of the soul.”

Now none of this is sounding so delicious except for this: at the end of the wrestling match, Jacob declares victory: “*I have seen God face to face and prevailed*” he declares. Like most wrestling matches, Jacob does not come away unscathed. He tells the stranger his name which, in ancient cultures, was to give up power to one’s adversary. The adversary gives him a new name, Israel, which means “the one who strives with God.” He walks with a limp, a perpetual reminder of the encounter. Yet, for Jacob, the encounter was cathartic, chasing the demons of despair and preparing him, finally, to be reconciled to his brother after a generation. Reconciliation? Priceless! And, delicious!

For us, the message is that life is “Filled with Deliciousness.” Sometimes it is in the tangible comfort of comfort food. Sometimes it is the spiritual food of compassion, obedience or faith. Sometimes it is in wrestling with our demons and giving them, and ourselves, over to God. In all of these we are called to trust in a God who provides for our needs, provides abundance when we are consumed with scarcity, journeys with us even when we don’t deserve it, and makes possible that which human vision sees as impossible. What a mighty God! What a wonderful God! Life, filled with deliciousness. May we savor it, today!