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Weekly Letter – 2 August 2026

Genesis 32:22-31 – What's in a Name?

Jacob is on his way back home. He ran away because his older brother Esau vowed to kill him after he bought Esau's birthright for a bowl of cawl and stole Esau's blessing from their blind father by dressing up in Esau's clothes. He also left to find a wife from the place the family had travelled from. He got conned by his father-in-law into marrying the less marriageable daughter, but eventually got Rachel whom he loved. He conned his father-in-law out of a load of livestock, and now is returning home wealthy. But still in fear of his brother, who is coming towards him with 400 men.

So, Jacob sends his family and servants across the ford at Jabbok and is alone in the dark. A 'man' comes and wrestles with him till daybreak. The man hurts his hip, but Jacob says he will not let him go unless he blesses him. The 'man' asks his name and says he will no longer be Jacob, which means 'grabber' or 'supplanter', but 'Israel' which means 'striver', because he has 'striven with God and humans and has prevailed'. In response Jacob renames the place: from Jabbok, meaning 'free flowing' to Penuel, which means 'face of God'. Whoever the 'man' was, Israel interprets the encounter as wrestling with God.

These are old stories that weren't told to tell a worked-out theology, nor give an example of the right way to behave. There are family conflicts. Dishonesty. Cleverness. Love. Fear. But at the end of it, Jacob who grabbed at his brother's position, becomes the father of the twelve tribes of Israel, through wrestling and prevailing. He is changed by experiencing God, so that places that were mere geographical features of flowing water become the place where he comes face to face with God.

There are times when we wrestle with the past, confronting our mistakes or regrets, and we walk away limping. There are times when we struggle with other people and the impact they have on our lives. There are times when we grapple with God; beset by injustice, suffering and uncertainty about what to do for the best. If we hold on, we might find there is still a blessing in the wrestling, and a renewed identity for the future.

Simon

Sunday Morning Worship in Christ Well, and on Zoom at 10.30 am will be led by Rev Simon Walkling. We will celebrate Communion. Bible Readings: Matthew 14.13-21: Genesis 32.22-31.

Cycle of Prayer in the Region – we will pray for Uniting Church, Sketty.

Prayers for every household – Pembroke Street

MOVED TO ACT

(Lectionary Readings: **Genesis 32.22-31**: Isaiah 55.1-5: Romans 9.1-5: **Matthew 14.13-21**)

Lord Jesus,
you saw the crowd hungry and you had compassion on them.
You saw the marginalised and the dehumanised, treated with contempt.
You saw an unequal world,
with such a gap between the powerful and the weak.
You were moved with compassion, and revealed the generosity of God.

Thank you, that then and now you journey with us.
You see the many victims of war and injustice.
You see the sick, the oppressed and marginalised.
You see the widening divides.

Lord Jesus, you move us to be compassionate too,
to give our resources into your miraculous hands.
Give us grace to be your body in the world today,
sharing your love and compassion with others far and near.

Amen.

Irene John (URC Prayer Handbook 2026)

