

Proper 24, Year C

Genesis 32:22-31

Psalm 121

2 Timothy 3:14—4:5

Luke 18:1-8

Today there is a common theme in our lectionary, a golden thread woven through all our readings. (If you missed it, you weren't paying attention!)

In the Old Testament, we hear the ancient story of Jacob, caught up in an all-night wrestling match with the angel of God. He fights and struggles 'til morning, and when he breaks on through to the other side, he winds up with a new name, a blessing, and a broken hip.

In the Gospel, Jesus tells the story of a poor widow who needed justice but would not be heard. So what does she do? She badgers the judge, shows up at his house, and threatens him with a black eye. Instead of slapping her with a restraining order, the judge throws up his hands and says, "Fine! I'll rule in your favor if you'll just leave me alone!"

And finally, over in the Apostle Paul's second letter to Timothy, we hear Paul sum it all up for his young friend when he says, "Timothy, continue in what you have learned. Be persistent. Do not give up on the Gospel."

As I read these scriptures over and over this week, I couldn't help but hear in the back of my head the voice of Nick Hyder, the late legendary former coach of the Valdosta High School Wildcats. I didn't play football in high school, but *anyone* who went to Valdosta High during the Hyder years—whether on the team, in the band, or on the cheerleading squad—heard Coach's oft-repeated injunction: "Never, never, never, never, never, never, never, never, never quit." That, my friends, is the theme of the day.

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But what does it mean? We hear that we are supposed to wrestle with God. We know that are to be persistent in prayer. And yet, I as a priest and you as God's faithful people already know that things rarely work out exactly as we want them to. We are elated with God when something goes our way—the sale on the house finally closes, a promotion gets offered, a good parking space opens up in front of the Wal-Mart—but when one little thing goes wrong, we fall into despair and cry out, "Where is God?"

Over the past few weeks I have found myself talking and listening to a lot of people who are struggling in one way or another: struggling with life, struggling with family, struggling with prayer, struggling with God. Maybe things aren't working out the way they thought, or life hasn't gone the way they planned. Next thing they know, they find themselves sitting in the priest's office, wondering out loud, "Where is God? What have I done wrong? Why am I here?"

To my surprise, what I've ended up saying almost every time is, "You know what? Maybe God has you right where he wants you. Because I don't know about you, but for me, it's

