

## Interactive lesson



picture from <https://www.pexels.com/photo/newlyweds-wrestling-on-arms-16905166/>;  
photo credit Photography Maghradze PH

What are the people pictured doing?

Would anyone like to try arm-wrestling me?

In what other ways do people wrestle, and with whom?

With whom did Jacob wrestle?

Did Jacob really win? Why do you say that?

What kinds of things do you wrestle with these days?

What is most important about the outcome?

What about wrestling with our faith? What do we wrestle with?

What is most important about the outcome?

Like Jacob after his night of wrestling, we may feel pain or hurt after wrestling with others or with God, but if we hold on to the relationship, we may be blessed in ways we did not foresee.

Remember in these days of political/social divisiveness, it is absolutely OK to argue about our views and to hold different opinions, as long as we cling to our relationships and value each other.

The goal is not to hurt one another, but to share understanding and help one another develop strength – whether physical, moral, resolve, or some other kind of strength, challenging it without severely hurting

the person will help them get stronger.

May you continue to grow in faith and love of God.

### **Gospel lesson**

After telling the parables of last week, Jesus arrived in (and was rejected in) his hometown. Then word arrived of Herod having killed John the Baptist, word brought by John's disciples after they had buried his body; this brings us to:



picture from <https://www.freebibleimages.org/photos/jesus-5000/>

### **Matthew 14:13-21**

NRSV

<sup>13</sup> Now when Jesus heard this, he withdrew from there in a boat to a deserted place by himself. But when the crowds heard it, they followed him on foot from the towns.

<sup>14</sup> When he went ashore, he saw a great crowd; and he had compassion for them and cured their sick.

<sup>15</sup> When it was evening, the disciples came to him and said, "This is a deserted place, and the hour is now late; send the crowds away so that they may go into the villages and buy food for themselves."

<sup>16</sup> Jesus said to them, "They need not go away; you give them something to eat."

<sup>17</sup> They replied, "We have nothing here but five

loaves and two fish."

<sup>18</sup> And he said, "Bring them here to me."

<sup>19</sup> Then he ordered the crowds to sit down on the grass. Taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven, and blessed and broke the loaves, and gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowds.

<sup>20</sup> And all ate and were filled; and they took up what was left over of the broken pieces, twelve baskets full.

<sup>21</sup> And those who ate were about five thousand men, besides women and children.

*The word of God for the people of God*

<Hymn "ALL Who Hunger">

TFWS #2126>

## Message: Wrestling with Our Hunger



picture from

<https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/worship-planning/the-path-of-the-disciple-searching-for-the-face-of-god/tenth-sunday-after-pentecost-year-a-lectionary-planning-notes/tenth-sunday-after-pentecost-year-a-graphics>

Please pray with me?

Great Provider of what we need to live,  
as we take time now to further consider today's  
scriptures, please

- speak Your words through my mouth,
- open our ears to hear Your message, and
- abide in our hearts,

That in wrestling with Your Word, we learn to [freely and unhesitatingly] share the blessings You give us with all the world. Amen.

This week we are disciples “Searching for the Face of God – Wrestling with Our Hunger” along the way.

“Worship this week can be a reminder that we are seeking the face of God when we gather but also when we scatter. Our hunger for God is not only met when we gather for worship but also when we are at work, when we are in fellowship, when we engage in conversations and build relationships, when we serve and love as we are sent to do.”



*picture from MMMS collection*

Some years back when my sister from California visited NY with her young children, they took the train up from the city to come see me. During the train ride, they looked out the window at the beautiful upstate NY countryside.

They noticed that some corn fields had smaller, lighter-colored cornstalks and others had taller, darker green cornstalks. They were amused to note that the taller, greener ones all seemed to grow next to cow fields – to their urban eyes, evidently getting better fertilized made corn grow better.

But we country folk know that not only is the grass not always greener on the other side of the fence, sometimes the greener stuff is not what we want or need to satisfy our hunger.

However, we like our preconceptions. They are comfortable for us, if not downright amusing or enjoyable. My sister found their discovery so funny that she was disappointed when I explained about how the taller, darker cow corn used for feed was a different variety of corn than the sweet corn we eat, that the height and color had nothing to do with cow manure from the next field over fertilizing them.

When our preconceptions are challenged, we have to wrestle with the information we have before us. Sometimes we cling so tightly that we get hurt before we let things go.



picture from <https://www.freebibleimages.org/illustrations/jacob-esau-reunited/>

Jacob wrestled with going back to Esau. He wanted to be reunited with his family, but he had preconceived notions that he needed to have the upper hand, to be stronger than Esau. In wrestling with the stranger, Jacob found that while refusing to concede, he got hurt. Yet the stranger was allowed to leave unscathed simply by giving Jacob a blessing.

From this Jacob learned that rather than trying to lord his position over his twin, a gentler approach would serve their families better. He took a humble approach and made peace with his brother. Their families flourished as a result. In wrestling with God, Jacob gained wisdom.

Our hearts seek God. The psalmist cried out to the Lord, concluding with “when I awake I shall be satisfied with beholding your presence.” Our souls hunger for the Holy Spirit. People always have.

We see it in the Gospel reading. Jesus had withdrawn by boat; the crowds could not travel on the water. Yet they watched where He was sailing and followed Him, desperate for the restoration He could provide. Jesus loves us, so even though His own heart sorrowed for the loss of John, Jesus took care of the people.



picture from <https://www.freebibleimages.org/illustrations/ml-feeding-5000/>

The disciples had preconceived notions about how food could be provided and what the people needed to do to eat. Jesus made them wrestle with that notion, telling them to feed the crowd themselves.

They only had five loaves and two fish. That was not really enough for just the dozen disciples and Jesus,

let alone the thousands in the crowds. How often do we think that we do not have enough for ourselves, let alone enough to share? Does Jesus excuse us from sharing what we have with those in need?

Let's look at the example Jesus set before us. First, in front of everyone who was hungry, He blessed the food and broke it up to be distributed by the disciples among those present.

So what should we do when we do not think we have enough? Before those who hunger, lift it up to God and give thanks for the blessing, then share what we have with those God has set before us - our family, our friends, our neighbors, our community (be it local or a much larger community).

Put aside those preconceived notions about what must be or what limits out opportunities. Wrestle them out of your thoughts and let the miracles of God take over! Otherwise, we become like the people over whom Paul had such great anguish in the epistle to the Romans - people to whom great blessings are offered and yet blow the amazing opportunities before them.



*picture from MMMS collection*

This week, trust God to provide!

- † When it comes to our faith journeys, hunger after the Lord with all that is in you – God will feed your spiritual hunger with blessings to spare.
- † Look around you for hungers/needs in the neighborhood: not what you think “should” be, but what people are distressed by.
- † Take stock of what resources are available to address those needs, even if minimal, and start with those.
- † Be humble and give God thanks for providing – and do not hesitate to do so publicly, before those who will be sharing it, sharing in it.
- † Accept help, even from unlikely sources, to multiply effectiveness – God sometimes works through those we least expect!

In these ways, God can use us to restore and build up individuals and communities into something more wonderful – God’s kingdom here on Earth.