



Who here remembers Saturday afternoon wrestling? I was hooked, personally.



As a young teenager, surging with testosterone, I loved watching the good, the bad and the frankly *ugly* playing battling with one another. It all came to an ignominious end once the news broke that most English wrestling, like its American counterpart, is fixed. It's therefore not really 'sport', if its fixed. It's really just entertainment.

But most of us of a certain age will never forget the heroes of Saturday afternoon.



There was 'Giant Haystacks' – literally a giant of man, with a great bushy beard, who could always be relied on to break the rules and do some dirty deed to his opponent. His arch rival was Big Daddy...whose real name turned out to be 'Shirley Crabtree' – from a time when Shirley was a boy's name too!

Wrestling, of course, is a world-wide phenomenon. And in many cultures, it is still taken very seriously, and never fixed.



Japanese Sumo wrestling is perhaps the best-known example, but there are many more, in Russian-speaking lands and further afield. Wrestling seems to appeal to men (especially), as a way of grappling with one another: not to actually *hurt* one another, but to test each other's strength and resolve. It's about trying new moves, and new positions. It's about balance, and timing.

And that's why, of course, wrestling is such a great metaphor for the act of thinking...and perhaps especially thinking about our faith.



Alexander-Louis Leloir (1865)

As we heard in our Hebrew Bible reading of today, Jacob is said to have wrestled all night with an angel – and angel whom he called ‘God’. His name was even changed as a result of this all-night match.

Jacob became Israel – which means ‘he who wrestles, or contends, with God’. And this is an essentially Jewish characteristic – the idea that human beings wrestle or contend with God.



Remember, for example, the story of Abraham, who negotiated with God about how many righteous people it would take to stop God destroying the city of Sodom.

\* Moses repeatedly argued with God about how to release the captives from Egypt.

\* Remember how the Psalms so often cry out to God in protest, asking him *why is this happening to me?!* and begging for relief.



The oldest story in the Bible, the book of Job, is one long debate, a verbal wrestling match from beginning to end, between Job and his companions, but also with God. God himself is portrayed in the story as engaged in a debate with the Devil.




This line of Jewish thinking was extended into that somewhat over-characterised musical 'Fiddler on the Roof'. As the hero of the story, Tevye, tries to negotiate with God over whether or not he could be a rich man. Biddy biddy bum!

So what does this rich heritage of wrestling with God mean for us? Well, first I suggest that it prepares us not to accept easy, simple answers to the questions of faith. Like a wrestling match, the journey of faith requires long, sustained, skilful action on our part. It is not enough for us to listen to one preacher, or read one book, and say "Ah! I've got it! That's what I believe!"

When I was training for this ministry, one of my tutors said to me that the primary task of the preacher is to help congregations to think for themselves...and that's something I've always tried to do.

Spoon-fed Christianity is simple Christianity.





Faith which offers easy answers is not real faith,  
and it rarely stands up to crisis and trouble.

(Tom Kennar 2019!)

Faith which offers easy answers is not real faith, and it rarely  
stands up to crisis and trouble.

(Facebook Advert)



**TOMORROW at 11.00**  
**(19 October)**



*Led by Canon Tom*



FaithTalk: Every  
third Saturday -  
open, honest  
searching.

That's why FaithTalk, which we held yesterday, is such an important event in my monthly calendar. It's a chance for us to ask the questions that we all have. Where is God? What is God like? How does God act in the world? How can I get to know God better? What happens after we die? How can we live well in this life? Where is God when things go wrong? Truly wrestling with God means that we shouldn't be afraid of asking the tough questions *about* God.



Secondly, I suggest that we shouldn't be surprised when God wrestles with us! Jacob didn't seek a wrestling match with the angel of God. The angel sought *him* out, and then wrestled with the poor fellow all night long.

For us, that means that life will sometimes throw us curve-balls which we really don't expect. A loved-one dies, suddenly. Or we lose a job. Or a hurricane blows our house away.

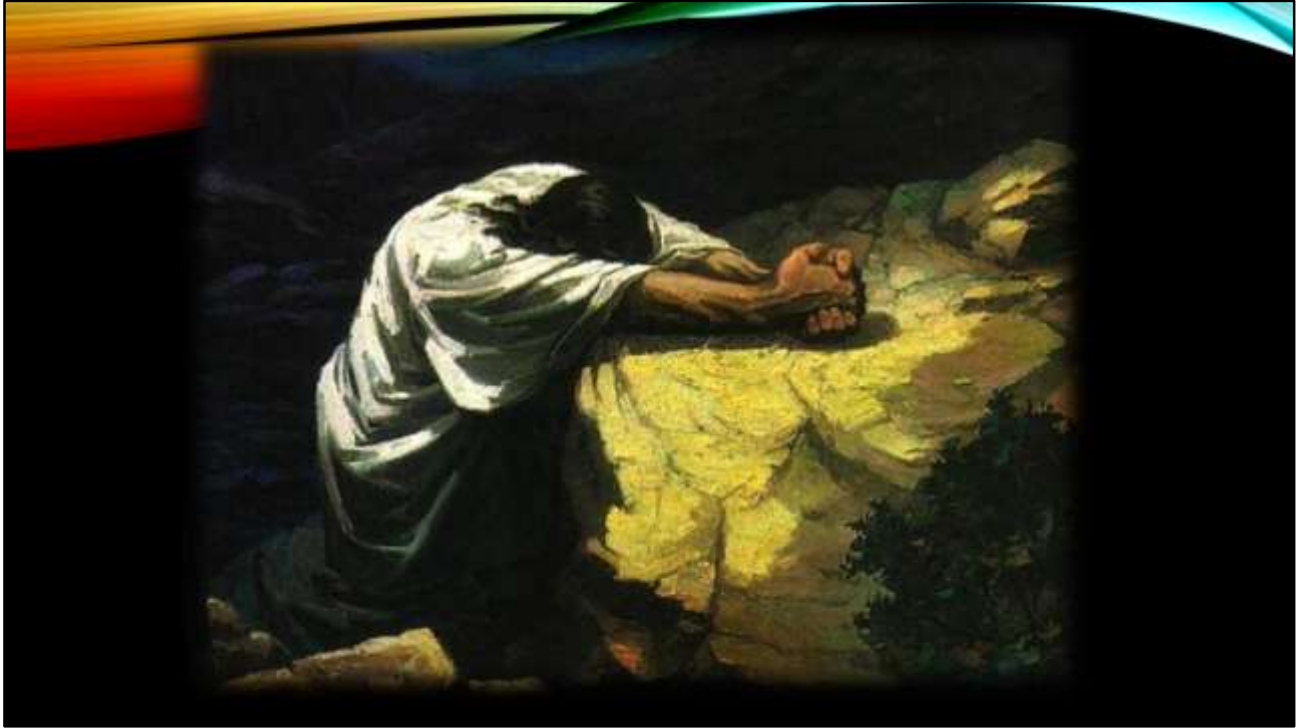
And whilst, with the Psalmist, we might well cry out in frustration 'why is this happening to me?!' – the lesson of Scripture is that God is at work, always at work, wrestling with us, and going with us through every tough circumstance of life.



At the end of Jacob's encounter, he ended up with a broken hip. Even to this day, Orthodox Jews will not eat the tendon which flows from an animal's hip, in remembrance of this event.

Wrestling with God, or indeed wrestling with *Life*, may well leave us scarred.

The journey of faith is not an easy one...but it is a worthwhile one.



This was true for Jesus, of course. Remember how he wrestled with God in the Garden of Gethsemane. “Oh, if only this cup of sorrow would pass me by...!”

But having wrestled, Jesus accepted God’s will, and the forces of evil which pressed on his life. He absorbed them, let them overcome him...and then he rose up above them, beyond them. He took all the pain of his torture and execution, and used it as a seed to plant in the garden of eternity.



Instead of his death being shameful and pointless, he transformed it into the very means by which we, through the Eucharist, can gain food for our spiritual journeys! Food to sustain us through our own wrestling matches with God!

May you know the ultimate joy and sense of fulfillment which comes from wrestling with God. May God you be always open to what God wants to teach you through everything that happens in your life.

Like the persistent widow, who hammers on the door of the reluctant judge, may you never stop wrestling with the Almighty...and may you find the peace which passes all understanding, when the wrestling is over.

Amen