

## Last Week on E.R.!

- "Feature of ER" or "Previously on West Wing" - recap of last week's story-line, in case your brain wasn't working!
  - always a big help for me!
  - what problems the different characters are facing, who they've been kissing, what story lines are likely to come up in this week's episode...

## Jacob's Situation

- Abraham.... Isaac.... infertile wife, prays for her, she had twins:
  - Esau, elder, man of outdoors, action; Jacob, younger, stay-at-home;
  - Jacob and Esau fallen out - stolen birthright and blessing;
  - Jacob fled to uncle Laban's;
  - on the way encounters God, stairway to heaven, start of relationship;
  - arrives at Laban's, works, marries, has kids - lots of kids, lots of wives!
  - accumulates wealth, sheep & goats...
  - Laban's sons grumbling - Jacob decides to leave!
- So, in incident we read, he is nearing the end of the journey back from Laban to Esau:
  - from one place of rejection and danger to another;
  - from one situation of uncertainty to another.

## Jacob's Reaction

- What was Jacob's reaction, looking towards encounter with his brother?
  - fear, trepidation!
  - cunning, deceit still in his mind; instinct is still to sort things out by himself!
    - *(his name in Hebrew means "heel", which sounds like liar, cheat)*
    - but also seeking God - ambivalence!
    - *(he was seeking forgiveness from Esau, reconciliation!)*

## Encounter with God

- Wrestle at Peniel - the face of God
  - had to struggle - never had to rely on anyone before, and he wasn't about to now!
  - but, had to admit failure to prevail
  - had to admit illegitimacy of the blessing he'd stolen from Isaac, his father, and now begs for God's authentic blessing - he was facing his past;
  - left with new name: "Israel" - struggle with God; grapple, engage; not just a nod and say hello!
  - more personal and intimate than God of Bethel / God of ancestors!

## A Changed Man

- Jacob left that encounter with God a changed man:
  - less sure of himself, in a positive way;
  - more aware of his limitations;
  - and most of all aware of his dependence on God.
- He also left energised to live differently:
  - rather than fleeing conflict, he seeks some measure of reconciliation;
  - not something that is either easy, nor that works out perfectly!!
  - *(Esau's descendants were to go on and become sworn enemies of Israel through much of the later OT)*

## In a China Shop

- A story is told of a madman who came into a china shop carrying a hammer. He swung it at a display and smashed it to pieces. People stopped, rushed across from elsewhere and gazed in astonishment. A whole crowd of people gathered round to see what had happened... and slowly dispersed as things calmed down. Some hours later a little old man came into the shop with a box under his arm. He

took off his coat, put on a pair of glasses and very, very patiently began mending mending the pots. No one, of course, stopped to watch.

- Lets, like Jacob, wrestle with God, not letting him go until he blesses us.
  - and let us allow that wrestling to shape the way that we live and relate to others, stripping away pride and self-reliance.

### Grappling?

- **What does that grappling look like?**
  - probably different for each of us...
  - it will be Scripture speaking to us...
  - it will be experience challenging us...
  - it will be conversation with other Christians stretching our understanding...
  - through all of which God will be making himself more vividly real, and inviting us to relate to him more deeply, more intimately, more obediently...
- Often times this grappling will come as we grapple with a particular issue in our own life:
  - it will be leaders in our church, or a book, or a sermon, or something, confronting our behaviour - and us responding to that challenge
  - it will be some suffering or circumstance that raises questions and forces us to ask how or why...
  
- **In our praying, time to reflect:**
  - how are we grappling with God just now?
  - how can we take that forward?
  - have we yet got to the stage where our grappling needs to be changing our behaviour?