

When Jen and I decided to get married,
one of the first things we talked about was our last name.
We both would have considered ourselves politically progressive,
and we felt the need to indicate as much,
by what our last name would be after we got married.
She was the Griswold, and I was the Kuhn.
Our thinking was that we didn't want her to take my last name,
because of the notion of property,
or patriarchy that is attached to that.
This was the same reason,
we did not want only Jen to hyphenate, while I would remain a Kuhn,
because we thought we would still run into the same problem of "ownership."
We then thought about combining the two last names into one;
Such as Gruhn
or Kriswold
...those just sounded too ridiculous.
So we decided we would both hyphenate the same.
Now like I said,
We thought this was a great idea...
That was until we went to the DMV.
When we tried getting our CT licenses,
I was informed that Jen's hyphenation would not be a problem;
But that they could not change my name.
I showed them my social security card,
and yet they could not wrap their heads around my request.
They finally figured out how to accomplish this,
and after a few hours at the DMV,
it was official,
I could now drive as a Griswold-Kuhn.
This was also the point that I realized I might have made a mistake.
I can't tell you how many times I receive mail,
And the sender refuses to hyphenate my name.
Or,
On official documents from the Episcopal Church or when I was at Yale,
there was this utter resistance to acknowledge what I wanted people to know about me,
that I was not like the rest of those "backwards thinking misogynists,"
who made their wives take on their patriarchal customs.
Instead what I got was just annoyance after annoyance,
And a lot of crazy looks along the way.
I have come to realize
that what my name is,
does not automatically say what I want it to;
But as our Genesis reading shows us,
our names can say something about us.
I looked up online what my name "means" and found out something interesting...
The name Karl is the German form for Charles,
which means a strong man.
Alright, that sounds good,

And that Kuhn means someone that is Bold.

I can live with that too.

Now the Griswold,

well the Griswold part of my name is a little more interesting,

Griswold means a dweller at the woods frequented by pigs...

Huh,

What does that even mean?

So,

I am a strong and bold man that dwells in the woods frequented by pigs?

OK?

If you have never looked up the meaning of your name,

race right home after church today and check it out!

It will surely be accurate.

The bible is very intentional about the names given to certain individuals;

For example,

Adam, means one from the dirt,

And if we remember back a few weeks,

the creation story tells us that the first human, Adam,

came from the dirt.

The names Cain and Abel,

have taken on significant meanings even in our culture;

When someone declares that a person is "raising Cain",

it means that they are causing all sorts of trouble and problems like Cain did when he killed Abel.

Our reading this morning tells us that Jacob,

has his name changed to Israel after he finishes wrestling with the Angel.

And we are told that the name Israel means one who has encountered God.

Before we talk about the name change,

It is important that we look at the events leading up to it.

Jacob has finally decided to leave his shady Uncle Laban's house,

and take his wives and kids on a journey.

We are not told why Jacob felt the need to send his family ahead of him that night,

but none the less he does.

At this point we heard how Jacob encountered a "man" and they began to wrestle.

I gotta tell you,

I don't know how all of you have responded to this story,

but I find it a little strange that Jacob is hanging out in a place where there are guys waiting to wrestle.

For all you wrestling fans out there,

I picture a guy that looks like the Ultimate Warrior or the Undertaker,

Veins popping out of his neck,

Face paint,

Maybe not so much the tight spandex,

but you get the point.

Jacob goes toe to toe,

With not just a man,

But we are told in the story,

That he was an angel.

I don't want to speak for anyone else,

But if an angel started wrestling with me,

I don't think I would keep fighting,
But I would roll over and play dead.
We are told that Jacob grappled with this until the morning,
and even then he would not relent.
So the Angel touches his hip socket and knocks it out of joint.
At this point in the story I have a couple of questions,
and I am sure you do as well.
The first is this:
Why didn't the Angel just dislocate his hip earlier if he had the power to?
Second,
What in the world is God trying to say to us today though this ancient wrestling match?
I think the answer can be found in a synthesis of the two questions.
Clearly the Angel could have ended the match at any point.
But instead he chose to let Jacob continue on his pursuit of a blessing.
Sometimes God can reveal his plan to us in a very straight forward way,
but other times,
God challenges us to go through our own personal wrestling matches with Him,
so we too might be blessed.
Going into my last semester at Yale,
I had just begun the exciting process of looking for a church to serve at.
At first,
I believed wholeheartedly that God would provide for Jen and me,
and I had no doubts whatsoever.
As the weeks turned into months,
my faith started to get a little shaky.
I mean,
Here I was watching my classmates get jobs,
and I was starting to panic...
What if God doesn't come through for me?
What will I do?
I suppose I could teach at a school or something;
I could also go back to be a manager at Starbucks,
they have health insurance.
I knew it,
God had left me!
I couldn't believe it!
But one day towards the end of the semester,
I prayed to the Lord that He keep the promises He had made to me.
What I mean is, I knew that God was behind my call to go to seminary and pursue ordination.
As I stated last week,
I could see God's plan for my life throughout everything that had happened,
so why would this be any different.
At that point,
I decided to keep wrestling with God for the blessing he had promised to give me.
Maybe this is you today.
Maybe you feel like God hasn't blessed you in the way you thought He promised to.
Well,
Get suited up,

put on your facepaint,
and work on your grappling skills!
Wrestle with God,
and tell Him you won't let go until He blesses you.
And I don't mean blesses you in superficial ways.
But,
This is the key though,
You can't let go!
Even if it appears that your hip has been dislocated,
Hang on for dear life,
and tell God you want His will for your life to come true.
That's the key though,
His will. His blessings.
We need to get on our knees in prayer everyday,
and plead with God that He bless us in His time and according to His plans and promises, not just what
we think we need;
We also need to read the bible on a daily basis,
so we can have relationship with God.
This is how we wrestle with God.
When we don't pray,
or we don't read the bible,
it is as if we have given up fighting for the blessing which God has promised us.
But the story shows us,
that if we are willing to fight,
and be persistent no matter how hard it might get,
God will be faithful to bless us.
Do you want God to bless you?
These wrestling matches can be difficult a lot of the time.
Maybe you have lost your job,
or your kids are really stressing you out;
Maybe you are having trouble making your bills,
or you have lost a loved one.
It is during these difficult wrestling matches,
that we must continue to fight,
and demand that God bless us,
out of faith that He will bless us.
I know this might sound a bit crazy,
but as our reading shows us this morning,
when we demand that God bless us according to His will,
God will honor that.
He will bless our relationships,
our careers,
our church,
and so many other areas of our lives.
When we have these encounters with God
and we don't relent,
God will do with us what he does with Jacob,
change our identity.

Jacob gets his name change after wrestling with God.

His name goes from meaning "one who catches the heel" (in ref. to his episode with Esau) to one who has encountered God.

What does your name mean today?

Is your name affiliated with one that is a heel grabber,

Or one who has encountered the living God?

God desires to give each of us new names.

I am called to no longer be known as a strong bold individual that dwells in the woods with pigs,

But rather as one who has wrestled with God,

Demanded a blessing from Him,

And received it!

What name is St. Paul's called to have?

Do we want our church to be a place whose name means,

One who gossips about each other,

Or one who treats each other poorly?

Or do we want the name of St. Paul's to invoke to our community,

A people that have encountered God;

A people that love each other,

A people that put their neighbors above themselves?

This is up to us,

and our willingness to wrestle with God.

May we as individuals, And as a church, Wrestle with God, Demand His blessing, And have our names forever changed. Amen.