

I went to a funeral Friday for a guy named Leo. Leo and his wife Tracy and I served together on the committee that got the new Waverly Aquatic Center built. For as long as I've known them, I've known how important their faith has been to them.

That really came through in the funeral service. The pastor and the three friends who did eulogies talked about a man head over heels in love with Jesus...a man who wasn't afraid to share his faith and joy and invite others to know Christ too. One of the speakers talked about how Leo was always up front in worship, hands way up in the air, eyes closed, swaying – lost in that moment with God.

In his younger years he'd not been religious. But he had some sort of encounter with Christ that changed him forever and he went all in. In some form, he had his own burning bush experience.

Now my relationship with Leo wasn't such that I'm really privy to all the details of his faith story – I don't know whether he ever wrestled with his faith or not, but in his funeral service, what came out was a man with no doubt or ambiguity.

I know other people like that...they are in love with God, deeply trust God, and can say that God is in charge of their lives. Some write glowing Jesus-soaked posts on social media. Sometimes, they are not very comfortable with doubt.

Sometimes I envy a faith like that. When it's clearly real and not just someone saying what they think they're supposed to, it's a very holy, joyful thing. It was that way for Leo. And people like that are good for the church – they just can't stop themselves from telling people about their own relationship with Jesus and what he's done for them. They invite people to come to their church and experience it for themselves.

But my faith mostly isn't like that. It's not that I don't believe or trust God. It's not that I haven't seen God work in my life. It's not that I'm not blown away by God coming to the world in the flesh, dying and rising and by what that means for me and for the world.

But my witness suffers from my Scandinavian rooted reserve. And I have questions.

Today's reading suggests that I'm in good company.

Sometimes we'll say – or at least I do – I'd really like a burning bush experience...a little clearer word from God.

But then Moses had a burning bush experience and he still had questions. Lots of them.

God calls from the bush, and Moses says Here I am. But after he hears what God's asking of him, it changes to Who am I to do that? Then, who are you?

But it seems to me like Moses' questions are pretty legit. I mean Moses has escaped death by Pharaoh twice. Now God wants him to go back?

Look at his last attempt to just help one Hebrew. And the response he got from his fellow Hebrews when he tried to mediate their dispute wasn't very promising either.

Why would God think Moses is the one that should be sent to Pharaoh to free Israel now?

Yes, Moses has questions.

But here's the thing. God doesn't mind Moses' questions. Patiently, God keeps answering. And not only that, God gives up the divine name. A couple weeks ago, we heard the story of Jacob wrestling with God by the River Jabbok.

Jacob would not give up until God blessed him. In that blessing, Jacob was renamed Israel which means the one who has striven with God and with humans and has prevailed. But God did not give Jacob the divine name, even though he asked.

Jacob would have been Moses' many times great-grandfather. Moses is descended from Jacob –Moses is descended from a God-wrestler.

Now Moses seems to be following in Jacob's footsteps. And his persistence pays off too. Only this time, God does give up the divine name...well sort of, anyway. I am who I am is one of the most puzzled over phrases in scripture.

In Hebrew, it's just the verb *to be* which in characteristic Hebrew fashion can be translated more than one way. It gets variously translated as I am who I am; I will be who I will be, or just shortened to I am... Jahweh in Hebrew. Another, I am who I will be and I will be who I am was preferred by one of the commentators I read. He said that probably really captures what the divine name means.

Essentially, God says I am the God of your ancestors and I will always and forever be the God of you and your people. It's a name that means God can be counted on. A God that won't leave Moses and the Israelites abandoned. God will be with Moses every step of the way.

That's a pretty big blessing. Moses' wrestling paid off.

And the divine name really captures how best we can describe or explain God...which is to say essentially not at all. God just is. I am fits a God who is presence....a God whose presence

towers over all creation, whose presence soaks all of creation, but whose presence also comes down to an encounter with one person, in this case Moses.

And that God can be counted on.

This dialog will go on for several chapters. Moses has all sorts of reasons why he shouldn't go. It's a real back and forth...Moses wrestles, God wrestles.

In the end of course, Moses does what God calls him to do.

And through Moses, God leads Israel out of slavery and into the promised land.

But Moses will continue to wrestle with God really until he dies.

And God keeps wrestling, too. It's a mark of an authentic, gritty relationship forged in the heat of the battle to keep God's promise to bless the world through Israel alive.

And here's something else. Through this gritty wrestling match that is Moses' relationship to God, Moses is blessed. The liberation and healing God will work through him comes first to him.

Raised by pharaoh's daughter, he begins life as someone who doesn't really quite fit in with either the Israelites or the Egyptians. From there he becomes a murderer despised by both. But by God's blessing, Moses becomes a liberator whose name would still echo thousands of years later by other slaves yearning for freedom.

I relate to these stories of wrestling with God. Over 20 years ago, God called me to leave medicine and become a pastor...a leader in the church.

That alone was a huge wrestling match. And it is one that turned into a huge blessing for me.

But I have questions. The church to which I was called – and I mean the capital C church - is beset with all sorts of problems.

I'm not one who likes to use the phrase the church is dying. But I do think there's something new struggling to be born, and for that to happen something will have to die.

My wrestling then becomes frustration over God not being a little bit clearer about what that is and what we're supposed to do, if anything.

And when I look at the problems of the world, I think about how a church that is truly in love with Jesus and striving to walk the Jesus way should be able to help. And obviously, many do.

But I don't know how we get the church as a whole to be that church. And I sometimes wonder and wrestle with why God doesn't act a little more overtly to transform the church. And the questions go on.

Apparently, God is still calling wrestlers to the work of liberation and healing. We tend to think it's not until liberation or healing is complete that we are blessed.

But it seems to me that sometimes it's in that wrestling that the blessing comes. Blessing that liberates and begins to heal the wrestler before he or she can ever be used to bless the world.

There will always be people whose faith shines through them...people who seem to have no doubts about God's power. People who are able to express joy in their faith, even when their lives are filled with grief and hardship. They can be a tremendous inspiration.

But I'm glad there is still room in God's kingdom for the wrestlers.