



was her favourite- but which did a lot of harm because rather than encourage him to build up a friendship with his brother in the hopes that they would enjoy the family estate together, she encouraged him to see himself as hard done by and justified in cheating his brother. That was what had caused the family breakdown.

When Jacob ran away then to his uncle's homestead, his uncle cheated him into working seven years to marry his younger daughter only to marry him off to the older one instead. He then had to work another seven years for the right girl, ending up with two wives who did not get on and his home life was hell.

His relationship with the in-laws was going from bad to worse and Jacob could see himself losing what little money and property he had managed to acquire in fourteen years of hard labour. He had a family to support and how was he to do it? He decided to go back home and try patching up the quarrel with his brother.

The journey was not an easy one. Uncle sent some of his men after them to search their luggage because he suspected them of stealing stuff from him, which they had and thought it quite right after the way he had cheated Jacob; they got away with it but now there was no way he could go back and what, he wondered, lay ahead?

So that last night, when Jacob had sent his family over the river and he himself sat alone on the other side- what must have been going through his head? He had had to fight all his life: fight the injustice of the system into which he had been born; fight the destructive influence of his mother; fight the meanness of his uncle and the divisions in his family; fight for his own survival.

And was he really strong enough to deal with all this? He had made huge mistakes; other people had got the better of him- how much more could he take? It was as though everything in life that had gone against him now faced him in this mysterious stranger who suddenly appeared out of nowhere and challenged him to fight.

Jacob put everything into that fight: all the anger and frustration; the guilt and self-pity welling up inside him. Unlike Thor, Jacob could recognise that this opponent was not just another man but something of the very essence of life itself. He wrestled furiously and neither gained an advantage over the other.

*I want a blessing from you, panted Jacob, a true blessing. Not the results of all my ducking and diving, wheeling and dealing. I want something real. I want the truth. I want something that will tell me who you are and who I really am.*

*You are "he who struggles with God" said the stranger, and for that I will bless you.*

An eerie story, isn't it? But there is a lot of truth in it.

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*There's always something, we say, so we look for scapegoats: people to blame for our pain and our failure. We take it out on our parents; we take it out on our brothers and sisters; we take it out on our partners, our children, our friends, our colleagues. We even snap at total strangers if we are having a really bad hair day. A lot of our close relationships crumble because we demand too much of other people. We expect them to make up for everything that's gone wrong in our life and they cannot.*

At the moment of course, as a nation, everything is Gordon Brown's fault. Whether it is rising fuel prices or falling house prices; the failure of the NHS or the war in Afghanistan; knife crime, drug smuggling, greenhouse gases: it is all down to Gordon Brown. We have to have someone to blame for all these problems and who better than the Prime Minister?



It was his own pride and arrogance that Thor really had to fight.  
 It was his own anger, jealousy and guilt that Jacob wrestled with.  
 It is greed, fear and suspicion that must be overcome if everyone is to be fed.  
 And however you interpret the feeding of the five thousand, I do believe that this is what Jesus was trying to teach us all along. He knew that life was cruel and unjust and he wanted us to fight back. But we needed to recognise what it was that we were fighting. It was no good taking it out on each other. The real enemy was what was inside us and they say, don't they, that what you most dislike in other people is what you most dislike in yourself. And what you find most frustrating about life is what you find most frustrating in yourself. The ultimate enemy is us.  
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But then finally and strangely comes a twist: Jesus did not want us to hate ourselves; to punish ourselves; as many of us do when life gets hard. He invited us to take it all out on him, just as Jacob, all those years ago, had taken it out on God. Jesus wanted to bear the fury and frustration, the pain and grief, the guilt and fear that the human race was desperate to vent on someone. Because he could take it and he could bear it and he could get the better of it. Then he could give us back our selves: free, clean and with the power to make a fairer world as sons and daughters of God.

Let me finish with the way Adrian Plass explained this:

*There must be some of us who want to climb up onto God's lap like small children and bash at his chest with our fists, and say "I hate you! I hate you! You knew what I was feeling- you knew what needed to happen and you didn't do it. You say you love me but you don't! If you did, you would have done something! I hate you!"*

*When my son was very small he did exactly that once or twice. First he would be really angry and then, when he had worn himself out with crossness, he'd cry, all curled up on my lap. Then, when he'd cried the last drop of energy away, he'd just fall asleep and I'd hold him for ages. And I think the important thing is that he had to go through all that fighting and fretting to get the nasty spiky feelings out of himself and he did it all in the safest place he knew, which was in my arms. God doesn't mind you being angry with him. He is used to taking the blame. In fact he would rather you took it out on him than on somebody else.*

Fight back with God and take out your anger and pain on him.

Then fight back alongside God and create his kingdom of justice, love and peace.

Amen.