

*The same night he arose and took his two wives, his two female servants, and his eleven children, and crossed the ford of the Jabbok. He took them and sent them across the stream, and everything else that he had. And Jacob was left alone. And a man wrestled with him until the breaking of the day. Genesis 32:22-34.*

At first sight Jacob is not an obvious partner for God's promises: he's cheated his brother, and in the section of the Book of Genesis preceding these verses he's been involved in some more double-dealing against his father-in-law. At the ford of the Jabbok Jacob wrestles with a stranger, who we discover to be an angel. This contest is a symbol of God's struggle to get through to him and to bring Jacob back into a relationship with him. As the struggle at the Jabbok ends the angel blesses Jacob and gives him a new name and a new future - he is to be called Israel, the father of a nation.

We can sometimes describe the spiritual life as *struggle*: to pray, to be faithful, to understand where God is at times like this, to discern what he really wants us to do. Our struggle, like Jacob's, is met by the force of God's love which is always leading us on to the next stage of our relationship with him. What could be that next stage for each one of us?