

Sirach 4:11-18

- 11 Wisdom teaches her children
and gives help to those who seek her.
- 12 Whoever loves her loves life,
and those who seek her from early morning are filled with joy.
- 13 Whoever holds her fast inherits glory,
and the Lord blesses the place she enters.
- 14 Those who serve her minister to the Holy One;
the Lord loves those who love her.
- 15 Those who obey her will judge the nations,
and all who listen to her will live secure.
- 16 If they remain faithful, they will inherit her;
their descendants will also obtain her.
- 17 For at first she will walk with them on tortuous paths;
she will bring fear and dread upon them,
and will torment them by her discipline
until she trusts them,
and she will test them with her ordinances.
- 18 Then she will come straight back to them again and gladden
them,
and will reveal her secrets to them.

Genesis 32:22-32

- 22 The same night he got up and took his two wives, his two
maids, and his eleven children, and crossed the ford of the
Jabbok. 23 He took them and sent them across the stream, and
likewise everything that he had. 24 Jacob was left alone; and a
man wrestled with him until daybreak. 25 When the man saw that
he did not prevail against Jacob, he struck him on the hip socket;

and Jacob's hip was put out of joint as he wrestled with him. 26 Then he said, "Let me go, for the day is breaking." But Jacob said, "I will not let you go, unless you bless me." 27 So he said to him, "What is your name?" And he said, "Jacob." 28 Then the man[b] said, "You shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel,[c] for you have striven with God and with humans,[d] and have prevailed." 29 Then Jacob asked him, "Please tell me your name." But he said, "Why is it that you ask my name?" And there he blessed him. 30 So Jacob called the place Peniel,[e] saying, "For I have seen God face to face, and yet my life is preserved." 31 The sun rose upon him as he passed Penuel, limping because of his hip. 32 Therefore to this day the Israelites do not eat the thigh muscle that is on the hip socket, because he struck Jacob on the hip socket at the thigh muscle.

Sermon

O Thou, who art the Perfection of Love, Harmony and Beauty,
The Lord of heaven and earth,
Open our hearts, that we may hear Thy Voice, which constantly
cometh from within.
Disclose to us Thy Divine Light, which is hidden in our souls, that
we may know and understand life better.
Most Merciful and Compassionate God, give us Thy great
Goodness,
Teach us Thy loving Forgiveness,
Raise us above the distinctions and differences which divide men,
Send us the Peace of Thy Divine Spirit,
And unite us all in Thy Perfect Being.
Amen.

This prayer, known as the Khatum, comes from Hazrat Inayat Khan, a traveling classical musician from Northwest India who brought Sufi Islam to the West. As some of you know, sufism is a mystical practice of Islam, one which dwells in the mystery of the divine. I begin with this prayer for a few different reasons. One: it's just beautiful, especially if we can hear the core inclusiveness beyond the language limitations available to Inayat Khan at the turn of the 20th century in Britain. Two, it reflects the growing population of Muslim students, faculty, and staff on our campus, who are integral to our identity as CapFam.

Not only is this prayer beautiful, though, and not only is it reflective of our community: it also resounds well with today's reading from Sirach. Sirach is a compilation of writings considered scripture by most Catholic and Orthodox Christian communities, and while not scripture, widely valued by many other Christians. Yet, Sirach was written by Hebrew Scribe Yeshua Ben Sira around 200 BCE. Though it's not a part of the Hebrew Bible, references to Sirach appear in Talmud, a key text in Judaism that provides foundational Biblical interpretation for Jewish law and theology. In other words, an emphasis on wisdom pervades these traditions.

And this emphasis extends further as well. Just a few minutes ago, we meditated following Dr. McDonald's leadership, who is also ordained as a Buddhist leader. We centered ourselves to connect with inner wisdom and wisdom beyond ourselves. We've sung and will continue to sing of the importance of wisdom. We will soon pray for wisdom. Many of the symbols on the front of the stage give image to various religious traditions and their foundational

wisdom. Wisdom matters to us all, from across our traditions. After all, isn't that why we're at a university?

Wisdom - knowledge, education, truth, skill, capacity - is generally the purpose of higher education. In theory, people choose to attend a college because they know they need to learn something particular that will help them earn a degree. In fact, that's why I believe college ministry is the most exciting place to be a pastor. At the intersection of the academy and of faith, people implicitly know there's still something to learn about God, faith, divinity, spirituality, the metaphysical realm. It's exciting to serve here because people more genuinely want to develop their faith and spirituality through an encounter with divine wisdom.

Here at Capital University, our Board of Trustees just approved a strategic plan that promotes, among other things, "Student Empowerment...(through) Reflective Learning, Artistic Expression, and Spiritual Exploration." In other words, whether seen through the Khatum or Sirach, or classes or worship or practice or concerts or games or conversations late in the library or even through our own freshly minted strategic plan at Capital University, the pursuit of wisdom matters.

There's deep wisdom, too, in our Genesis text today, though it's not as obvious as Sirach's emphasis. Here's some backstory on Jacob. You see, Jacob is the younger twin of Esau. As Genesis puts it, when they were born, Esau came out first, "red all over, entirely covered in hair," while Jacob came out grasping his heel. I imagine it's something like a barbie doll white knuckling the heel

of teen wolf. In fact, Jacob's name means, "heel grasper," which is an idiom for deceiver. That's what our English department would call foreshadowing. Jacob, through deception and deceit, eventually steals Esau's inheritance and Esau's blessing as the firstborn. Red and hairy, Esau was, but Jacob was cunning. And selfish. Because of Jacob's deception, the family split.

So at this moment, at the river, what you may not know is that Esau is on the other side, with an army. These brothers haven't talked for years, but now there's divergent potential: perhaps for reunion, and perhaps for destruction. Jacob has sent literally all of his people and possession, including his wives and children, across the river in front of him, perhaps to appease Esau or perhaps to delay his own demise. If destruction was coming, it was coming to Jacob last. A deceiver his entire life, it seems.

Until, that is, he wrestles with the divine. He comes face to face with God, and through that, face to face with his own selfishness. Jacob wrestles to a stalemate the creative power of the universe and finally, eventually, becomes who he is truly meant to be: himself. Not trying to be Esau. Not stealing from others. Not committing everyone he loves to potential destruction to save his own life - don't worry, everyone survives their encounter with Esau. He becomes himself by finally wrestling with the blessing that is meant for him. Not stealing Esau's blessing for himself, but instead releasing all of that across the river and accepting the divine blessing that wisdom always meant for him. That's the wise witness of Jacob.

Today, dear graduates, we mark this fact: you have wrestled with wisdom at the river we call Capital University for four(ish) years.

At times, you've felt tormented by wisdom. Seemingly endless assignments. Late nights that turn into early mornings at the library. A tome of facts to learn and a library of quandaries to ponder. Maybe, at times, you've tried to be Esau because you were afraid to be you. A few changes in major, a few changes in behavior, and now you're on track to cross the river. But today, we at Capital University, and I chief among them, will not let you go. Not until we bless you.

For you've wrestled with humans - roommate problems and disagreements with professors and an endless string of as yet unresponded to emails, and even yourself, trying to figure out who you are and who you want to be. And you've wrestled with God - spiritual questions and religious conversations and personal transformation. You've struggled with both, and so much more.

We will not let you go from this struggle, not yet, until we bless you.

Because today, you've prevailed. You've won. Not just a piece of paper, though that diploma certainly belongs to you (though you might be paying lenders for a few years). And not just a degree or occupation, though you're certainly prepared for the challenge (and your guardians are probably ready for your financial independence too).

What you've won is the journey of becoming you. Jacob's ultimate blessing wasn't that he beat the divine messenger in a slobber knocker of a royal rumble. It was, at that moment, Jacob stopped trying to become Esau and finally chose to become himself. Jacob stopped forcing a selfish wisdom that sought personal gain and embraced the eternal wisdom. Rather than forcing his own ineffectual blessing on himself, Jacob finally sought the blessing of the ineffable creator. Jacob sent away all the things that came to him through the deception of stealing Esau's blessing and finally embraced the blessing that was meant for him: himself as a beloved image of God. You in yourselves are blessings, beloved reflections of divine goodness. You needn't try to be someone else, for in yourself, and even in your wrestling, you are the blessing God intends.

You'll leave this place, like Jacob, forever changed by the struggle with wisdom. At times, I'm sure it felt like wisdom brought fear and dread upon you, tortured you with the discipline of deadlines. At times, I'm sure you felt ready to cross the river in front of you and instead found yourself in a wrestling match against an apparently undefeatable opponent. Hopefully the wisdom of the universe didn't break your hip, but you'll never walk the same after today.

Here's how I hope and pray you walk:

I hope and pray that you leave here inspired by perfection of love that made the universe, pursuing harmony and discovering beauty.

I hope and pray you leave with an opened heart to hear the voice of heaven speaking from within yourself and in the words of those you encounter along the way.

I hope and pray you'll bask in the divine light placed in your soul and reflected in the souls of every person.

I hope and pray that god gives you great goodness, teaches you loving forgiveness, brings you into peace with all others beyond the divisions so common of humanity, and bestows upon you a peace that can only be called divine.

And when, along the way, you come to a river and encounter your god, may you wrestle with the blessing that makes you who you are. May it come alive in your life. May it unite you in perfect being with all that exists.

You, dear graduates, are the blessing God meant for Capital University, for this world, and for yourselves. Now, with this blessing, we release you to cross the river, and in just a few hours, to cross under that gate as those who have struggled with human things, and divine things, and you have prevailed. Well done, good and faithful servants. Amen.

ROTC Ceremony Prayer

God strength and gentleness, Lord of conviction and compassion, we thank you for the sacrifice and service of these young men and women. As they now prepare to take the mantle of leadership, prepare the road before them. Undergird them wisdom, determination, humility and clarity. Prepare them to endure hardship if necessary, that your truth, justice, and equality might prevail among people throughout the world. Enable them to choose what is right, even when difficult, and to withstand the temptation to do what is easy yet wrong. May all citizens honor their service on behalf of our nation, and may they fulfill that service with integrity. We pray that you would bring us a world without war, and until then, we give thanks for the bravery of those who risk themselves to save the lives of others. Amen.

Distinguished Senior Leader Award Prayer

Inspiration of the Universe, we thank you for the myriad ways your spirit of leadership flows throughout our Capital community. Here, we especially thank you for the unique leadership of our Distinguished Senior Leaders. Each has blessed our campus in different ways: growing organizations, developing identities, furthering our mission as the #CapFam. As they venture onward from Capital, may you brighten their future with joy and courage, with vision and purpose. Put their gift of leadership to good work. Change the world for the good through them in the same ways you have changed Capital for the good through them. Now, we thank you for this food and the nourishment it offers our bodies. Strengthen us that we may lead with compassion and purpose. Sustain us that we may bear through difficult times. Inspire us that we may see the beauty of your eternity in every single today that we live. Amen.