

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be acceptable to you, O God, my strength and my joy... Amen...

The first person I ever knew to do a century, or a 100-mile bike ride was my granny. I always thought it would be something exhilarating to do, however I never got around to it, until I met Keenan.

As Keenan loves to bike and he has done multiple century bike rides.

And a few summers ago, all he wanted for his July birthday present was for us to bike to Green Bay.

And so, we awoke early one morning, before the sun was even up. We loaded our bikes with bags filled with—clothes, food, and lots and lots of drinks—and made our way on our bikes from the northeast side of Wausau to the start of the Mountain Bay Trail in Weston.

For those of you not familiar with the Mountain Bay Trail, it goes from Weston almost all the way to Green Bay. And most of the trail is a rail to trail, meaning it is an old Railroad path that has been converted to mostly gravel.

There are places where the trail ends and picks back again, but for the most part you are on a secluded path biking on dirt, gravel or mud through the woods, past farmland, along wetlands, lakes, and creeks.

It is beautiful, it is long, and in the heat of summer it is filled with horseflies, bugs, random animals, the occasional downed tree, and lots of dust if you are biking.

And for those of you who are bikers you know how wonderful, how addicting, and also how painful biking can be...

And on that day, biking to Green Bay, there were moments that I wanted to give up... Moments I wanted to stop and see if we could find a hotel to stay at along the way...

And there were moments I loved...

And there were moments of indulgence, when we took breaks and ate food, or when we stopped at the amazing grocery store in Shawano, each getting exactly what we craved...

And then there were moments when I was scared when a stray dog came running towards us barking...

Moments that I was terrified and maybe even cried a bit when a dark cloud that had followed us most of the day caught up to us, when we were just about 10 miles from our hotel, when the sky opened up and just poured...

But we kept on biking, in the rain and in the storm... As this was a trip that required true grit...

Grit that I was reminded of just the other day by another pastor...

As he said that grit is something we do not talk about nearly enough... But we should, as grit is important and is also a gift from the Spirit.

The kind of grit I am talking about is what it means for one to have bravery, courage, and determination despite difficulty. True grit requires passion and perseverance.

And when looking at grit from a theological mindset, some biblical words that come to mind are steadfastness and endurance.

And there are multiple passages that talk about endurance and being steadfast in the Bible...

Yet, one passage that stands out with a clear image of what grit is, is the passage that we heard today...

The long and dark night when Jacob wrestled. As Jacob persevered, grappled, endured, and even limped for a blessing.

A blessing that becomes the origin story for the entire tribe of Israel...

A nation whose faith was built after Jacob saw God face to face...

Because the theology of grit comes down to how we build our faith.

And when our faith is built solidly on the hope that we find in Jesus Christ...

When we place our trust in Christ day in and day out...

When we trust in the power of the Holy Spirit.

When we trust that God is enough...

It is then that we are able to get the bearings beneath our feet... It is then that Christ can become the solid rock on which we stand...

Though we may fall off that rock... day after day we persevere, we endure, and we climb back up on that rock...

Because life and faith require grit... Life and faith require moving forward on that path, despite the heat, despite the biting horse flies, despite the storms, despite the many miles that tick by...

Because it is in that space that we find God. As God meets us in the grit...

Afterall, God was there with Jacob all along wrestling with him...

And though we may encounter God differently today, God is still in the grit...

Perhaps, God is those little particles that give us the treading beneath our feet.

Perhaps, God is there on the horizon providing us glimmers of hope...

Because no matter what, God is there, with us, in the trenches... Giving us blessings and hope. Even if we walk away from them limping a little.

Limping that I have felt, like when Keenan and I finally arrived later that day in Green Bay... Tired, sore, sweaty, and drenched from the storm... Where we spent 2 nights in a hotel and then loaded up our bikes, and biked home.

But things looked a little different when we left, without the storm, so we turned on our gps, to get us back to the trail head, which must have taken us a slightly different way...

Because when we were just about home, we discovered, to our horror, that we were only at 99 miles...

And so, we biked on, past our house to get that extra mile in... We persisted because we were determined to get in another 100 miles.

And though that 1 extra mile felt like forever, I was still able to do it...

Because us humans, even though we have our limits, we were still created to do hard things... Hard things of course that look differently for each of you... And hard things that change in what we are capable of throughout our lifetime...

But we can do hard things... Because God is with us...

God is in the midst of everything that is hard. Not creating a magical solution to make things less hard... But God is there to wrestle with you...

Because God has grit... So much in fact, that God is always willing to go that extra mile for you... Amen.