

30<sup>th</sup> April 2022

## Wrestling

“For we wrestle not against flesh and blood ...”

*Bible, Ephesians 6:12*

Izaak Walton was a 17<sup>th</sup> century English biographer and author of *The Compleat Angler*. He lived close to St. Dunstan's Church and became a friend and fishing companion of the vicar there, John Donne. After Donne's death in 1631, Walton wrote *The Life and Death of Dr Donne* to accompany a collection of Donne's sermons. Now, I'd always thought of John Donne as a kind of saint, a man of holiness, with a depth of spirituality at which one could only marvel. I was interested, therefore, in Walton's honest appraisal of John Donne's journey of faith, at one point affirming:

*And sure, if [Donne] had consulted with flesh and blood, he had not for these reasons put his hand to that holy plough. But God, who is able to prevail, wrestled with him, as the Angel did with Jacob, and marked him; marked him for his own; marked him with a blessing, a blessing of obedience ... his blessed Spirit.*

I've always been encouraged by Jacob and God wrestling together. But while I can understand Jacob the rogue trying to get to grips with his life before he effected a reconciliation with his brother, Esau, can it *really* be true of John Donne? And yet, Walton says God had wrestled with Donne, before His calling, service, holiness and blessedness were understood.

The most impressive poetic work by the Charles Wesley is a piece called *Wrestling Jacob*. In it, Wesley sees humanity wrestling with Christ, perhaps recalling his own personal struggles with his faith and calling.

*In vain Thou strugglest to get free,  
I never will unloose my hold;  
Art thou the Man that died for me?  
The secret of Thy love unfold;  
Wrestling I will not let Thee go  
Till I Thy name, Thy nature know.*

Today, therefore, as I wrestle once again with God on my journey of faith, I give thanks that I am in good company – Jacob, Izaak Walton, John Donne, Charles Wesley. And I thank God even more that, in my wrestling, our hold on each other is never unloosed.

### A prayer for today

*Loving God, thank you for not losing hold of me,  
even when my hold on you is loosened. Amen*