

2nd Sunday of Lent

Cycle B, 2.28.21

Genesis 22:1-2, 9-13, 15-18/

Romans 3:31-34, 11:1/ Mark 9:2-10

WHEN FAITH IS REALLY NEEDED

Good morning everyone, I hope you all had a lovely first full week of Lent. What I want to talk about today is that first reading -- about Abraham and Isaac. Now when I first heard this story as a child I was very confused. [For a while I didn't want to go on and father-son trips... for obvious reasons.]



Like most people when they first hear it, I immediately focused on the horrifying events and thought "Why on earth was that necessary?" But that right there is why I think this story is important. Because over the course of life we often focus on the negative events and ask why? Well, if you take a step back and don't take the story completely literally, you will see that the core message is about a man who has faith that God can help see him through anything -- and he's right.

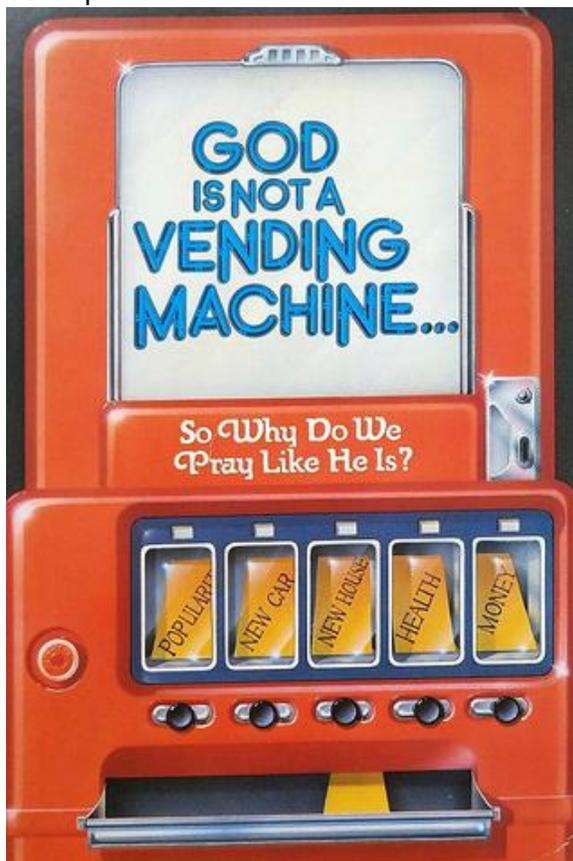
You see, often when I'm struggling, I find myself playing the fun game of asking "Why me? Why is life asking me to do this? To get through that? To face this? Why, if I'm trying my best to be a good person, does my life keep getting filled with unexpected challenges, tests, and obstacles? It just doesn't make sense." And, as we know, it's in these instances when our faith is really tested. It's easy to be

God's buddy when things are going well. But when the chips are down, somehow it's easy to forget about faith when, in fact, that is when you need it most. Because when we're going through a challenge, nothing's scarier than thinking we're going through it alone. But really we're not.

For instance, at the beginning of the pandemic I lost my job and I was about to get an apartment in San Francisco. And if that weren't bad enough I also learned that I had re-torn the labrum in my shoulder. So I'd need to have another surgery and it'd be a while before I'd be able to start my job search and move out. And lastly, when November rolled around, my grandfather passed away. Now, that's not a fun list. And during this time I was playing a lot of "Why me?" But then I took a step back and I realized that God had been there with me the whole time. Honestly, I did not like that job, but I was afraid to quit. And committing to an apartment in the city would have forced me to stick with it for another year at the least. And having that surgery forced me to slow down and take the time to think about where I actually wanted to live and what I actually wanted to do. And while my shoulder was recovering I had the free time to visit my Grandfather as much as I could before he passed away.

God isn't a vending machine; you don't just insert a prayer and get exactly what you want. And there is a reason for that. There was an episode of an old show called the "Twilight Zone" that helped me understand that reason. In it, a man who lived a life of sin died and awoke in a fabulous room. The nicest sheets on his bed, the best food at his whim. All the money he could ever have hoped to steal right there -- no strings attached. He couldn't believe his luck, for in his afterlife he was given everything he ever wanted. So

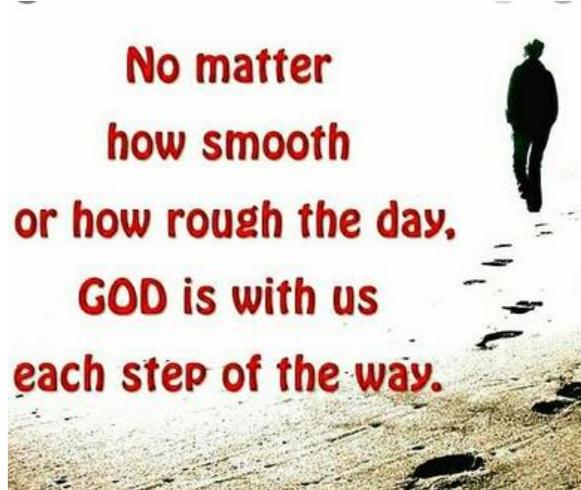
what's he do? He hits the town! Runs into a casino and realizes that he can't lose! He pulls a slot machine, jackpot, he sits down at black jack -- what do you know? -- 21 every hand. The whole time he can't stop thinking, "With the way I lived my life everybody must have made it to heaven." Then, a week or two pass by in this "paradise" and he's unhappy. How could he be? Everything he ever wanted at his fingertips and yet, just a week or two, and he was sad, bitter, and bored. He cried for a challenge, he begged to lose, and then he did, but he knew that it was just because he had asked to. Eventually he realized he wasn't in heaven at all. In fact it was the other place.



So you see, everyone wants their lives to be just so. That's what gets us up in the morning. And it's okay to want things to be good and to want to triumph over obstacles with ease. But life is random. As

we've seen this past year, it's full of all kinds of unforeseen obstacles. But that doesn't mean we should pray for a life without any struggles; there'd be no point. We should pray for the strength to deal with the struggles life throws at us. And we should have faith that God -- whether we're looking for him or not -- is there and helping us along the way.

**No matter
how smooth
or how rough the day,
GOD is with us
each step of the way.**



Ryan Hennessy