

"The Highest and the Lowest: Faith In Lent" | Rev Tim Frickenschmidt | February 28, 2021

Old Testament Reading [Gen 22:1-3, 6-13](#)

22 After these things God tested Abraham and said to him, "Abraham!" And he said, "Here I am." ² He said, "Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you." ³ So Abraham rose early in the morning, saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him, and his son Isaac. And he cut the wood for the burnt offering and arose and went to the place of which God had told him. ... ⁶ And Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering and laid it on Isaac his son. ... ⁷ And Isaac said to his father Abraham, "My father!" And he said, "Here I am, my son." He said, "Behold, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?" ⁸ Abraham said, "God will provide for Himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son." So they went both of them together. ⁹ When they came to the place of which God had told him, Abraham built the altar there and laid the wood in order and bound Isaac his son and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. ¹⁰ Then Abraham reached out his hand and took the knife to slaughter his son. ¹¹ But the angel of the LORD called to him from heaven and said, "Abraham, Abraham!" And he said, "Here I am." ¹² He said, "Do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him, for now I know that you fear God, seeing you have not withheld your son, your only son, from Me." ¹³ And Abraham lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, behind him was a ram, caught in a thicket by his horns. And Abraham went and took the ram and offered it up as a burnt offering instead of his son.

Epistle Reading [Rom 4:13, 16-21](#)

¹³ For the promise to Abraham and his offspring that he would be heir of the world did not come through the law but through the righteousness of faith. ...
¹⁶ That is why it depends on faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed to all his offspring—not only to the adherent of the law but also to the one who shares the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all, ¹⁷ as it is written, "I have made you the father of many nations"—in the presence of the God in whom he believed, who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist. ¹⁸ In hope he believed against hope, that he should become the father of many nations, as he had been told, "So shall your offspring be." ¹⁹ He did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body, which was as good as dead (since he was about a hundred years old), or when he considered the barrenness^[a] of Sarah's womb. ²⁰ No unbelief made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, ²¹ fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised.

Gospel Reading [Mark 8:22-25, 31-38](#)

22 And they came to Bethsaida. And some people brought to Him a blind man and begged Him to touch him. **23** And He took the blind man by the hand and led him out of the village, and when He had spit on his eyes and laid His hands on him, He asked him, "**Do you see anything?**" **24** And he looked up and said, "I see people, but they look like trees, walking." **25** Then Jesus laid His hands on his eyes again; and he opened his eyes, his sight was restored, and he saw everything clearly.

31 And He began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes and be killed, and after three days rise again. **32** And He said this plainly. And Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him. **33** But turning and seeing His disciples, He rebuked Peter and said, "**Get behind Me, Satan! For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man.**"
34 And calling the crowd to Him with His disciples,

Introduction

The main question to which our Lectionary leads us today is What is Biblical Faith and do we have it? Two points: (1) The rebuke of the half-blind and (2) The end of the journey.

Background

1. The Rebuke of the Half-Blind.
 - a. In Bethsaida, Jesus touches a blind man, once, and the man becomes half-blind. Jesus leaves the man half-blind, at least for a moment, to show His disciples what they are like, spiritually. (With a second touch, his sight was restored and saw everything clearly.)
 - b. On the way to Jerusalem, even after Peter confesses that Jesus is Christ the King, Peter shows spiritual half-blindness by rebuking Jesus for saying what the Messiah would have to do. Admitting our spiritual half-blindness is a major part of what Lent is. We'll never enjoy the heights of faithfulness to Christ unless we seek help with the depths of our lives.
 - c. The highest cannot stand without the lowest ([Thomas a Kempis, The Imitation of Christ](#)).
 - Faithfulness to Christ cannot stand without repentance.
 - The life change that He offers cannot occur without humility.
 - Joy cannot occur without honesty. We have to own our half-blindness and ask for help from faithful trustworthy people.
 - d. When Jesus tells His disciples that He must suffer, die, and rise, the disciples reject it: His disciples expect that the King who has come to save Israel shouldn't die; and Jesus teaching that He will rise from the dead will sound crazy to those Jesus is seeking to follow Him. So, there is a gap between who Jesus is and who we think He is and what He should do for us. While we have expectations for Jesus, He has expectations for us (Mark 8:34-38). And Jesus rebukes Peter's spiritual half-blindness and expectations of Him, basically saying Biblical Faith does not involve the expectation that it is God's job to make our lives on earth easier.
2. The End of the Journey.
 - a. We can see what Biblical Faith is in Abraham when God asks him to sacrifice his only son, Isaac, who he loves, as a burnt offering.
 - b. In Gen 12, God tells Abraham to leave his country, people and everything dear to him to begin a journey to a land He will show him later, making him a life-long exile. All Abraham had was the promise from God that he would be made into a great nation. But, to make a great nation, you must have a son. So, elderly Abraham and his 90-year-old barren wife Sarah wandered for 25 years. When three strangers (angels) tell Sarah she will conceive, Sarah laughs, cynical laughter. When Isaac is born, her laughter becomes joyous. Fifteen years later, God tells Abraham to take his son and kill him. What kind of God would ask that?
 - c. In Gen 12 God tells Abraham to cut himself off from his entire past; and in Gen 22 God tells Abraham to cut himself off from his entire future, by sacrificing his son. And it's not just Abraham's future at stake, it's the blessing of the entire world which was at stake: because Abraham has lived for decades with the conviction that God was going to use Abraham's faith to bless the entire human race for all generations to come; and now God is asking Abraham to wipe that blessing, the salvation of the world, off the face of the earth. The only way possible for Abraham to follow through with God's order to sacrifice his only son, was if he had a faith like is spoken of in Romans 4:17, where Paul tells us that Biblical Faith is a radical trust in God who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist.
 - d. A major part of our struggle with faith is that we don't know what God's promises to us are. In Mark 8, Jesus clarifies to Peter and the disciples what His promises are. God has not promised us any earthly things, but He has promised glorious heavenly things: to raise our bodies from the dead, to be to His people like a husband is to a bride, to cast down the mighty of this earth who will harm us and to bring His heavenly throne to earth, setting the world to right. So, will we give up gaining this world to not lose our lives with Jesus in the world to come. That is the call of Jesus on this second Sunday in Lent.

Discuss

1. ¶1b Admitting our spiritual half-blindness is a major part of what Lent is.
2. ¶1c The highest cannot stand without the lowest (•repentance, •humility and •honesty).
3. ¶1d & ¶2c What Biblical Faith isn't and what Biblical Faith is.
4. ¶2b&c What journey? Abraham's journey, Jesus' journey, our journeys?
5. ¶2d What end? Abraham's&Isaac's journey; God's&Jesus's journey, ended with our salvation?

Conclusion/Application

•We can and should trust God that He will give us everything we need for our souls. He's already proven His goodness and faithfulness to us because God followed through on taking His only Son, Jesus, who He loved, and offering Him as a sacrifice for us. What Abraham didn't have to follow through with, God did. If God has already shown Himself so good, faithful and loving to us, that He would extinguish His ultimate joy and laughter in this world to gain our souls for the life of the world to come, how would He not also give us all things for the sake of our souls. According to Jesus, in Mark 8, our souls are worth more than this entire broken world. Jesus gave up His life in this world to gain us. We should ask if there are any things we should give up for Him to keep us. Amen.

He said to them, "If anyone would come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow Me. ³⁵ For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake and the Gospel's will save it. ³⁶ For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul? ³⁷ For what can a man give in return for his soul? ³⁸ For whoever is ashamed of Me and of My Words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him will the Son of Man also be ashamed when he comes in the Glory of His Father with the holy angels."

By Pete Myers