

## Sin

Today the three readings combine to teach something that isn't so obvious at first blush.

At first blush, it sounds like God is a moral monster by demanding a dad sacrifice his son; Paul sounds like a nag and a prude; and Jesus is suggesting that a mere cup of water might earn your salvation.

But that's the first blush of things, and with Scripture, things are rarely as they seem on first impression.

Many who hear Paul's letter today will think he's calling us out on our personal sins.

You know, the old standbys, like anger, pride, lust and the long list of private failings.

That may be part of what Paul is getting at, but it's the tail on the dog.

The dog itself is something deeper, more earth moving, more challenging than that.

To get a sense of what Paul is saying, we have to go first to the Old Testament lesson today.

You know this story.

Many of us have heard, and many of us have said: how could a good God ask a father to sacrifice his son?

Many will chalk this story up to the mean God of the Old Testament, so different from the God of love in the New Testament.

But that is a mistake.

Mining the depths of the Bible's hard readings is like being on an archeology dig.

We have to work slowly.

We have to work carefully.

We have to allow what we seek to reveal itself, lest we damage it in our haste or impatience.

As we saw last week on Trinity Sunday, the mystery of God is far deeper than our ability to understand.

Yet often, what we don't understand, we judge.

When we put ourselves in judgment over God, as many will do with hard stories like that of Abraham and Isaac, we not only miss what is in front of us, but we elevate ourselves to being god.

We don't have to look far to see what a mess we've made when we try to wear God's pants.

How many human beings have slaughtered their children, either at their own hand, like the young woman in Orlando who's on the news every day, to the millions of children slaughtered on the altars of patriotism, religious fanaticism or national security.

This history is a sobering reminder that when we find ourselves judging God, we are on very thin ice indeed.

If you find yourself judging God, it probably means you haven't slowed down enough, haven't looked deeply enough at what is really going on, not taken the necessary step back.

Let's do so now.

Something deeper is happening when God tests Abraham with: "Sacrifice your son."

God chose Abraham to be the father of a new people.

He called him out of his home, told him to pack up and move; just as so many of our parents and grandparents packed up and moved to these distant shores.

In the new land, God places on the shoulders of Abraham a new people, whose descendants are sitting in these very pews today.

God's people, Abraham's progeny, show the world what life in God looks like.

A life of justice, equality, the sharing of abundance, humility in our relations with one another.

And the question to be answered was this: Can Abraham's faith bear that weight?

Would he make the ground of his being not culture, not his occupation, not even his beloved child, but God?

Would he put trust in God before all things?

There's a movie starring Liam Neeson, the handsome Irish actor that shines a light on the mystery of today's hard reading.

In that movie, Neesom puts family above all else.

Even when his son is involved in the death of his girlfriend.

Neesom hides the bloody tire iron that killed her, lies to the police, and helps his son evade arrest.

Even when the son finally confesses to his parents the truth of what occurred, a truth showing the death to be an accident, Neesom continues to hide the truth.

In bed with his wife one night, Neesom bitterly recalls the story of Abraham and Isaac, the one we heard today.

He curses God and declares that nothing in the world is more important than family.

Yet that belief, with all the cover ups it required, all the lying and evasion, merely put Neesom's son squarely in the bulls eye as a suspect for first degree murder.

One can leave that movie wondering: "Would I do anything different?"

So perhaps it's not so strange that God would test this man from whom God's people would come; that God would see if Abraham really did, under the most horrific of circumstances, look to God and nothing else for salvation.

Abraham did.

Isaac walked free, and a nation's first seeds were planted.

And this is where we pick up with Paul in Rome.

Paul wrote these words in the heart of the empire.

An empire in which class and country and family were the ground of all being for its residents.

The emperor played at being god and the people bowed to him and to all he provided.

It was to this reality that Paul speaks of sin.

Not personal sin, but the deeply rooted, fundamental sin of NOT making God, before all else, even before our beloved children, the ground of our being.

This is the sin Paul calls the Romans, calls us, to recognize.

It is this sin we are called to turn from.

And in that turning, we may slowly find that those personal sins, the lusts, the angers, the greed's, the prides, they too begin to dry on the vine, since what feeds them is precisely our love affairs with all that is not God.

At this point, you may be saying: "That's nice religious sentiment, it doesn't work in the real world." To which one might respond: "What is the real world?"

If Paul is right that "in God we live and move and have our being," then this utter trust in God is rooted not in some arbitrary command, not in fear, and most definitely not in guilt.

If Paul is right, this utter trust in God comes when we open our eyes to see that every love we have ever loved, for wife, grandchild or son, every love, lives only because we are inextricably wrapped in God's love.

That's why we get the examples like a vine and its branches, a tree with its leaves, a flower with its pedals. Examples that try to reveal our true bond with God.

To get us walking on this journey, God sometimes does radical stuff, like with Abraham today, like with Jesus on the cross.

Like the farmer's mule who needed a two by four between the eyes to get his attention, sometimes it's the drastic lesson that wakes me up.

How might we take a step on this journey?

It isn't complicated, but it isn't easy either.

We take a step on this journey by letting go.

Letting go of control.

Letting go of fears.

Letting go of being right.

And in the letting go, trusting that as we release, we are released into the very bosom of God.

From there, we can trust that no matter where we are, no matter the circumstances, no matter the good news or bad, where we are is where we need to be.

As Meister Eckhart says: "We ought simply to follow where God leads, that is, to do what we are most inclined to do, to go where we are repeatedly beckoned to go—to

where we feel most drawn. If we do that, God gives us his greatest in our least and never fails.”

Within that restful trust, controlling nothing, we might give a glass of cold water to one of these little ones, only to discover that we have just served the Creator of heaven and earth.

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