

Do you ever find yourself confused?

Once upon a time, a magician worked on a cruise ship. The audience was different each week, so the magician did the same tricks over and over again. One problem: The captain's parrot saw the shows each week and began to understand how the magician did every trick. Once he understood, he started shouting in the middle of the show: "Look, it's not the same hat!" "Look, he's hiding the flowers under the table." "Hey, why are all the cards the ace of spades?"

The magician was furious but couldn't do anything. It was, after all, the captain's parrot.

Then the ship hit an iceberg and sank! The magician found himself on a piece of wood in the middle of the sea with, as fate would have it, the parrot. They stared at each other with hatred but did not utter a word. This went on for a day and then another and another. Finally on the fourth day, the parrot could not hold back:

"OK, I give up. What did you do with the Ship?!"

The parrot was confused. He didn't understand what had happened to the ship. That story brings a smile to my face every time.

We can laugh about the parrot being confused. But the reality for many of us is that he is not the only one confused. We are too.

We get confused by the challenges of life. We get confused by the difficulties of life. We get confused by times when things don't seem to be working out the way we want or by struggles we are having with others.

**In our scripture for today, we are reading a story that highlights how difficult life can be.** It is the beginning of the story of Jacob, one of the three patriarchs in the Old Testament. If you are reading through Genesis, you would have had a chance to learn of Abraham and how he learned to be faithful to God.

You would have had a chance to learn of Isaac and his early struggles in life and how he came to eventually marry Rebekah. Now, the story continues with the birth of their children.

You would think, that given the mysterious, God given way their relationship started that they would find life easy. You would think that life would be handed to them on a silver platter and they wouldn't have any problems, or at least not major problems. But that is not the way this story goes. In fact that is not the way many stories from the Bible go. This is probably a good thing, because rarely do our lives move along easily. When challenges come to us, what can we do? What do you do? Our scripture offers us food for thought.

**The first challenge of this scripture is that Isaac and Rebekah are not able to conceive and have children.** Their response to this dilemma is to turn to God and ask God to see their need and come to their aid.

We are told that God hears their requests. Not only does God hear their requests, but God responds and answers their prayers.

This passage reminds us that when we are in the midst of challenges and dilemma's that God really does see that God really does care, that God really is interested in what is happening in our lives.

This is important to remember, because when we find ourselves overwhelmed by life, it is easy to feel as if we are all alone. It is easy to wonder if God sees us or cares about us. It is easy to wonder if we really matter at all to God.

When challenging times come your way, are you willing to turn to God? When challenging times overwhelm you, are you willing to bring those concerns to God?

**The second challenge of this scripture is that the children that are born get locked into a struggle.** Their sibling rivalry gets in the way of their getting along. Do you ever have a hard time getting along with others? What do you do? How do you deal with it?

This story of Jacob, one of the patriarchs of the Old Testament, is a story of conflict. Jacob is a scoundrel. He is constantly grabbing and trying to take that which is not his. He tries to take advantage of others. Today's story talks of how he is taking advantage of Esau.

In all honesty, this is not a story that has a nice neat ending to it. It doesn't wrap up well in a nice tidy package. It is fraught with difficulty.

You can look at the parents and say, "Well, they offer a great example of how NOT to parent. Jacob favors one child and Rebekah favors another."

But from no matter what angle you come at this passage, and the rest of the story of Jacob, his struggles are meant to get us asking ourselves, how do I deal with struggles? Do I do it with wit and cleverness? Do I take advantage of as many people as possible? Do I burn bridges? Am I willing to build bridges and turn to God? How do I deal with struggles?

Two summers ago, my daughters Natalie and Whitney went on a mission trip to Louisiana. When they returned, they shared with me not only what was good about the mission trip. But they also shared with me the struggles they had on the trip.

They shared how there were some hard feelings created among some of the participants. They talked about how not everyone got along. They talked about the drama that happened.

One of the things I discovered is that my daughter Whitney had created some hard feelings by how she treated some of the other girls, in an attempt to get the attention of some of the boys. Within a day of their return, as Natalie and Whitney were getting ready to go back to North Dakota for the school year, many of the participants of the trip were at our house to say goodbye to my daughters.

Before I knew it, my daughter Whitney was in my bedroom, crying. She was sad about how she was being treated. She was sad at what she had done to cause the treatment.

In that conversation, I looked at her said, "Whitney, I love you. You are a beautiful young lady. If you want to go through life seeking to get attention of others, especially guys, you can do that. And you will get attention. And it will work for a long time.

"But in the process you will burn a lot of bridges. You will go through a lot of relationships. People will get tired of you.

"You have to ask yourself, 'Is this what I really want for my life? Is this the best way I can honor God?' And you will have to make some decisions. You don't have to go through life burning bridges and hurting people. You can change. But it is really up to you."

She looked at me and said, "Daddy. I want to change. I want to be a different person. You wait and see. I will change."

One of the things that Debbie and I were so proud of Whitney over is that at the time of her death, she was working to change. She was working to become a better person.

Each one of us faces conflict in our life. Each one of us struggles at times to get along with others. And we have to ask ourselves, how am I going to do this? How can I turn to God and invite God to help me with my struggles?

May God help each one of us, face the challenges of living, by learning to trust the one who loves us so much, that we were given Jesus Christ.

Amen