

+ In nomine Patris et Filii et Spiritus Sancti + Amen.

Text: Genesis 22:1-14

Theme: Forward-looking Faith



Dear friends in Christ Jesus,

The sacrifice of the only Son of God, Jesus Christ, for your sins, and those of the world is such a radical truth it could never be arrived at by logic, by consensus, or by deduction. The crucifixion, the atonement, the blood-pouring, life-giving redemptive act of substitution is the singular power by which the holy God is reconciled to sinful humans. Calamity cannot be avoided without it. So, our faith either clings to a desperate and foolish hope, or it clings to the only treasure, the only hope, worth having. The resurrection proves which is true. God grant that the Spirit would continually renew our trust in this Good News.

The struggle of the Christian life, therefore, is not the doing of *seemingly* good things when we have the mind to do them. Jesus says even unbelievers do that. (Though without faith they are not truly good works.) The struggle is believing the true things, the divine promises, so than when it's not suitable or convenient or even *reasonable*, we still pursue the right things from the right motives. Our relationship with God is a matter of faith because we cannot interact with Him according to human parameters.

Genesis chapter 22 describes the pinnacle of Abraham's life of faith. And what a mighty and mindboggling crescendo it is! The promised son, the impossible son, Isaac; the son gifted solely through divine intervention is ordered to be sacrificed. One might rightly be excused for thinking God has suddenly lost the plot. Think, after all, of what has transpired to that point. Abram, the exalted father is forecast to become **Abraham**, the father of many nations, the father of Israel, the father of the Messiah, the father of all who have, do, and will believe. But he has no heir. Seeing no hope of fulfillment, and with the encouragement of Sarai, he conceives an 'illegitimate' child through Hagar. God was not pleased. It is always sinful to circumvent God's will. But God does work good things even through our sinful foibles. So, Ishmael, the 'illegitimate' son, was also blessed greatly by God.

Abram was already 86 years old when Ishmael was born. He is now 99 years old when God raises the matter again. Sarai is past child-bearing age so there is derisive laughter at the suggestion. But nothing is impossible for God. Sarai, now Sarah, conceives and gives birth to Isaac. His birth is truly miraculous, foreshadowing the conception of Jesus in the womb of Mary. Now, after all that struggle, disobedience, intrigue, and faith, God orders Abraham to sacrifice him.

We can't pretend to fully know the mind of God or the heart of Abraham here. We can only go by what the Scriptures reveal to us. That's what we must always do, follow the Scriptures. It's clear this event is no inconsequential matter. It's not recorded only for the sake of historical interest. The truths found here shine forth like a powerful searchlight beaming forward to the once-for-all sacrifice of the only-begotten Son. At the same time, they shine a powerful inward light beneficial for searching the soul. Perhaps there are some things that are, or should be, on your soul-searching agenda? If you need some suggestions, hold up the mirror of God's law. What kind of sinner do you see in the reflection?

It's logical to query why God couldn't have found a different way to test the faith of Abraham. Something less radical than asking for the sacrifice of the son of the promise perhaps? After all, it was an abomination before the Lord to make human sacrifices. They were detestable to Him. The heathen nations were continually condemned for it. When the Israelites slipped into the same pagan practices the prophets roundly rebuked them. The command to Abraham is unprecedented. It is exceptional in every way. God is not granting a general license to break the Fifth Commandment. Nor is He playing fast and loose with human life. Here God is testing the faith of the one man, Abraham, in a way that previews the sacrifice of the God-Man, Jesus.

The literary indicators throughout the narrative paint the picture. *"God said, 'Take your son, your only son, Isaac, whom you love, and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering.'"*¹ But, Isaac wasn't Abraham's only son. He already had Ishmael. Yet Ishmael wasn't the one designated by God for this task. Regardless, the question is, "How could Abraham really intend to go through with it? A burnt offering?"

Maybe Abraham thought that if he had misheard or misunderstood God the passing of time would pacify his conscience. Surely Abraham was already trying to forget his previous failures of faith such as when he disobeyed God in the fathering of Ishmael or tried to pass Sarah off as his sister to save his own neck. But that's speculation and the Bible indicates something else which we'll come to in a minute. First, though, it's worthwhile considering this common way people try to deal with their sins. Let's call it the idea of diminishing culpability.

Do we feel that the passing of time washes away our iniquities? It is said, "Time heals all wounds," and the experience of vast numbers of people shows that many pains and traumas become less severe and more manageable over time. Our numbed faculties gradually recover. But this is a deception when it comes to the forgiveness of sins. The passage of time may give us the illusion that our past transgressions have somehow become inert, less harmful, like the coronavirus left on an untouched surface for many days. But repentance and forgiveness have no correlation with time. Furthermore, God dwells in eternity. Everything in the past is still present to Him.

Sin is forgiven not because it fades when ignored or left unaddressed. Sin is forgiven when Spirit-induced repentance causes the sinner to seek the mercy of God in Christ. And, having received that absolution in Christ it is *forever* atoned for. That sin is pardoned. Yes, there may still be consequences that have to be contended with. Sins weaves a tangled web. But you are freed from the accusation and condemnation of God.

Now, back to Abraham and Isaac. Isaac is not oblivious to what is happening. He asks his father, *“where is the lamb for the burnt offering?”*² Abraham’s reply, *“God Himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son.”*³ It’s not hard to see how this truth warps straight through time and rolls off the tongue of John the Baptist, *“Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.”*⁴

Reaching the destination, the altar is prepared, and Isaac is bound. Note that Isaac is no longer a small child, so it seems considerable cooperation is necessary on his part. This willingness is also a foreshadowing of the way Jesus willingly went to His death. The scene is now surely too surreal, too horrifying, to be adequately described and the tension too heightened to be imagined. At the moment of trauma God stays the hand of Abraham and provides a ram in the thicket. God provides the substitute. Abraham sheaths the knife, but the future sword will be plunged into the Lamb on Calvary.

How could Abraham really intend to go through with it? What was the nature of his faith? Madness or unqualified trust? Misinformed or unconditional? Abraham’s was not a hollow faith. The New Testament makes this commentary, *“By faith Abraham, when God tested him, offered Isaac as a sacrifice...Abraham reasoned that God could raise the dead, and figuratively speaking, he did receive Isaac back from death.”*⁵ You see, Abraham believed in the resurrection. He believed in the God who has the power of life and death. In Abraham’s heart Isaac was already forfeit, but he believed God could, and would, restore what He has required. Abraham had forward-looking faith.

Dear friends, when you struggle with your faith, don’t think God is going to give you a unique command in order to test you. Return to the promise of your baptism. There you became a child of Abraham by faith. In baptism the promised Son, Jesus, becomes your redeemer. Come to the table of the Lord. Here you receive the blood of the Lamb slain for the salvation of the world. Give thanks that on this altar there is no sacrifice needed for sin, only the sacrament. When doubts and fears overcome you in your journey of faith, hear these words: *“The Lord Will Provide”*⁶

Isaac, the chosen son of Abraham was a type of Christ, the chosen Son of God. More than the faith of one man was at stake. Here, the paradigm of salvation was being revealed. Isaac was figuratively raised from death. Jesus Christ literally, physically, bodily, triumphantly rose from death. He gives immortal life to all who believe. The Scripture says, *“Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: ‘Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree. He redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might*

come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit.”⁷ Amen.

+ In nomine Jesu +

Fourth Sunday After Pentecost

28 June 2020

Reverend Darrin L. Kohrt

¹ Genesis 22:2

² Genesis 22:7

³ Genesis 22:8

⁴ John 1:29

⁵ Hebrews 11:17, 19

⁶ Genesis 22:14

⁷ Galatians 3:13-14

