

Proper 7
Gen. 22:1-14
Sermon by Rev. Chip Graves

After having read our Old Testament lesson today, we realize that God expects us to obey. That's not always easy – and we may not even understand why until later. But still God asks it of us.

Ultimately, as we review Abraham's faith, we must ask ourselves, *are we willing to surrender anything and everything to the Lord? Ultimately, are we willing to sacrifice for God?*

The image of this classic biblical tale can be found in Rembrandt's rendition where a beautiful, muscular Abraham holds a knife high ready to thrust downward with a killing blow. Abraham's eyes are fixed upward, ready and willing to obey God's horrific command. This is truly an incredible scene; but it is not easy to accept, certainly not for any parent with child.

This passage rips me to the very core every time I read it. *Killing my child? What is God thinking? If you must God, take me. I'll be your sacrifice; don't take my child.* But this is not an option; not what God intended. God wants us to fully acknowledge, that in the midst of this most horrific passage lays much sacrifice, pain and therefore a deeper understanding of the faith necessary in our Christian journey.

After my initial reading of this text, I wanted to remove the offensiveness from this passage, to somehow justify the harshness of this text. Mentally, I began to build a case denoting a more loveable, likeable God. But this led me astray, constructing a weaker God, a compliant God. In essence, I'd taken Elohim, the all-knowing, all supreme God and diminished Him into an acceptable human fabrication.

Though with good intention, this reconstruction is dangerous and untrue. In my rewriting of this passage, I had strayed from the true God of Israel, the God of Abraham, Moses and the father of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. I had lost sight of who's in charge. We are not in charge. God is. It's not up to us. It's not up to us to soften God's command that we simply obey Him.

Simply put, God has asked Abraham to give up everything in sacrificing his son, Isaac. Though compelling, this remains a struggle for me. I understand with my head that obedience is in order but I fight it with my heart. I've got children...and for me or my wife to give up our children would bewould be devastating. Simply impossible.

But here is where faith comes in, a faith perhaps beyond our 21st century comprehension. St. John's, we are being called to a far greater faith, not a cheap faith as my wife and Bonhoeffer cautioned just one week ago; but a faith with sacrifice and a faith that will at times be painful. But a faith worth living.

Again, as we review Abraham's faith in our lesson today, we must ask ourselves, *are we willing to surrender anything and everything to the Lord?* I truly believe that the life of the Christian believer is a series of trials; our faith tested, proved and strengthened. And that Christian character is developed through this discipline. This extraordinary test undertaken by Abraham was certainly not the first overcome by him; there were many beforehand:

- Abraham had been called to leave his home and family.
- Abraham had buried his father, Terah, in Haran.
- Abraham had to go to war with heathen kings to save Lot.
- Abraham had to wait 25 years for God to fulfill his promise in Isaac.
- Abraham had seen his brother's family swept away in God's wrath.

-Abraham had been required to cast his son, Ishmael out of his house.

With Ishmael gone, Hagar gone and Lot gone, *what else could possibly be taken from Abraham?* And yet God commanded that he take his son in sacrifice.

In essence, I believe we are put to trial by God to prove and improve our faith. And that our trials reveal Christ and make him all the more precious. God demanded Abraham no less than He himself was willing to sacrifice as He himself sent His only Son to die on the cross; an even greater sacrifice than that of Abraham. In sum, as we review Abraham's faith in our lesson today, we must ask ourselves, *are we willing to surrender anything and everything to the Lord? Ultimately, are we willing to sacrifice for God?*
Amen.