

**Fifth Sunday after Pentecost**  
**June 28, 2026 • 10:30am**  
**Trinity Episcopal Church • New Orleans, LA**

**The Rev. Lex Breckinridge**

May the words of my mouth and the meditation of our hearts be always acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our strength and our Redeemer.

Sunday before last, we dropped in on Abraham and Sarah as they welcomed three surprise visitors to their tent under the oaks at Mamre. These visitors, to whom Abraham and Sarah extend lavish hospitality, turn out to be the Lord.

Down through the ages, Christian interpreters of the story have identified these three dusty travelers as the Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. They renewed the promise to Abraham and Sarah that, in spite of Sarah's advanced years, they would have a son. And a year later, it happens.

Isaac, born out of Sarah's laughter at the absurd proposition that she should bear a child who came to be known as the Son of Laughter. So here we are this morning. Three years have passed, and Isaac has grown to be a fine young man.

God's promise of a son has been kept, or so it seems. But wait, there's a new challenge. Now, I'm going to confess right now, I don't like the story of Abraham and Isaac and their trip up Mount Moriah.

I can't, for the life of me, being asked to do what God is asking Abraham to do. It seems monstrous. So I've wrestled with this story all week.

In fact, I would really have preferred to avoid it. The one thing I've learned over the years is that it's exactly those parts of the Bible that I'd like to avoid that very often have something very important to teach me. And of course, the reason I don't like the story and want to avoid it is because of the emotional reaction I have to it.

I'm a dad. How cruel to ask a dad to sacrifice a child. What kind of terrible, awful God would do such a thing? That's exactly the question that resonates throughout this story.

And it's a question that can't be avoided. But it's also occurred to me, as I've studied and sat with this heartbreakingly poignant story, that getting at the question raised by the story about the nature of God requires me to move beyond my emotional reaction to it and into the story itself. I'm called and you're called to engage the story on its own terms.

First, it's me, the contemporary reader of the story, who brings my own emotional reaction to it. The story doesn't have the set of emotional reactions to it that I do. The story is much more austere.

I mean, the story doesn't describe the emotions of any of the actors. So there must be something else going on. Remember, the story isn't told from Abraham or Sarah's or even Isaac's perspective.

It's told from the third person. And it's important to know, it's very important to know, that the story is being written down hundreds of years after the event it seeks to portray. Now, here's the key.

It's really written from the perspective of the people of Israel. The people of Israel who are looking back at their own historical roots and beginnings. The people of Israel who are watching this divine human drama unfold and trying to decide what it means for them.

The story of Abraham and Sarah has begun 30 or so years before these events. Settled and secure in old age, they don't have sons, but otherwise they seem very content in their retirement. Then Abraham has a vision from God telling him and Sarah and their household to set out from their home and go on a great journey.

God promises that by following this vision, they'll have sons and they'll have land. And those are the two most important commodities that anyone can possess in that time and place. Sons and land.

And on top of that, God tells Abraham that he will make of him and Sarah a great nation. I mean, who could resist a vision like that, right? And so they go down from the land of Haran, which is in modern-day Iraq, all the way along the fertile crescent to Egypt and back again to Haran. The journey takes years.

And as Abraham and Sarah followed the path that God's charting for them, all kinds of tests happen along the way. Abraham doubts God's promises more than once. But finally, Isaac, the son of Abraham and Sarah, is born.

The promise of a son, the promise of a future, seems right in front of him. But then out of the blue, there's another test. And that's where our story begins.

The comment that this is a test, remember, comes from the anonymous narrator who's speaking from the perspective of a community many generations later that, in fact, has become the great nation that God promised Abraham. While they and we already know the outcome of the story, Abraham, from within the story itself, doesn't know that this is a test. He's only told to follow God's direction, just as he did many years ago when he left Haran.

Now, had Abraham known this was a test, it wouldn't be a test at all, right? Here's the really important piece. This is also a test of God. God doesn't know what Abraham's response is going to be.

You see, God is taking a risk, too. All the trust that God has placed in Abraham is at stake. Later in the story, the angel of God has said to Abraham, do not lay your hand on the boy.

And the angel goes on to say, now I know that you fear God. Now I know. You see, God hasn't known the outcome until that very moment.

If we can hear this story on its own terms, we can really understand the magnitude of what God's calling Abraham to do. God, you see, God's calling Abraham on yet another journey. It's really similar to the journey, to his call to journey out from Haran.

This time the call is to journey up Mount Moriah. So what's God up to here? Why, after all these years on the road, after all this time patiently working with Abraham, so he'll accept the promise of a son and a future on God's terms, why would God suddenly turn the world upside down again? But, you know, it's not so much what is God up to that's important. It's Abraham's response, his response that lives at the heart of this story.

The narrator tells us that Abraham set out and went to the place that God had shown him. Abraham's entire life had been marked by a journey to a place he didn't know, into a future that he didn't always understand, while trusting, trusting that God would show him the destination and show him how to get there. So this is important.

The test here is not whether Abraham had the faith to believe that God would spare his child. That's not ever really an issue in the story. The test was whether Abraham could trust God enough to give up the promise of a son, to give up the promise of a future, and to start all over again.

The test was whether Abraham had really made the journey of faith to the point where he could really trust God and not just what he could see and hold in his hands. So listen to Abraham's response to Isaac's poignant question, where is the lamb for the sacrifice? Abraham's reply that God would provide the sacrifice isn't about Abraham having some foreknowledge of the immediate future that a ram was just going to magically show up in a bush. Abraham's response is a clear and unambiguous trust that God is at work in the world to provide whatever is necessary to fulfill God's promises, even when we can't clearly see it at the moment.

No wonder God learned something about Abraham here. You know, that's really the conclusion of the story from God's perspective. Abraham's complete and total trust, his complete and total surrender to the mystery of God's call on his life, has let God know that Abraham is willing to trust God totally with the promise and to trust God totally with the future.

As the people of Israel many generations later heard the story of the long struggle of Abraham, they sure understood it was also describing their own journey, their own journey through history as the people of God. And yet, you know, some of the conclusions that we draw from the story aren't really straightforward. They're like the parables of Jesus, you know, we got to wrestle with those, we got to wrestle with this story to learn what's here for us.

We have to live in God's world as people of faith without knowing as much as we think we know or want to know about God. I mean, that doesn't stop us from wanting to control God, though, does it? From wanting God to do it our way, from wanting God to do it my way, from wanting neat and tidy resolutions to complex and ambiguous issues. The truth is, we want to live by what we can see and what we can control.

We want a predictable God. We want a God who will keep us comfortable. We want a God who would never call us into uncertainty or into ambiguity.

And above all, we want a God who would never ask us to give up anything that we hold dear. But that safe and manageable God, that God that we want to control, that's not the God of the Bible. And it's sure not the God that we and Abraham meet in this story.

The God in this story is a God who calls us to let go. The God in this story calls us to total trust in the midst of the most intense crisis we can imagine. The God of this story calls us to complete surrender when the way forward is filled with doubt and uncertainty.

The totally paradoxical, completely counterintuitive word for Abraham and for us is the following. It's only in complete surrender to this dangerous, this wild, this inscrutable God. It's only in complete surrender that God will provide.

You know, it may not even be too much to say that it's only in our complete surrender to God that God can provide. As long as we cling to the known, as long as we cling to the certain, as long as we cling to the easy, unambiguous comforts of our opinions and our judgments of ourselves and our judgments of other people, we don't leave any room for God to provide. Our clinging too tightly to certainty and to control blocks the channels of grace that allow God's grace to flow.

You know, if God had told me to take a child of mine up Mount Moriah, I would grab that kid and run away as fast as I could, and I'll bet I'm not the only one. But look what we would have missed. You know, it does seem that we have a role to play in God's promise, which is really another way of talking about God's grace, God's promise.

Think about that for a minute. The promises that God makes is another way of talking about grace. Grace, you know, grace, we don't earn it.

We don't receive it because we deserve it, because we're worthy. We're all unworthy. I'm unworthy.

I'm more unworthy than you are. See, I make those comparisons. Abraham and Sarah were so surprised by God's promise that they spent 12 chapters of Genesis more or less running away from it.

We just have to accept it. In other words, we have to surrender to it, and that might be the hardest thing we ever do, to let go of all of our certainties, to let go of all that we hang on to, whether it's our stuff or whether it's our most cherished things. Our most cherished and valuable relationships, to let go of all that we think is going to save us.

This week, as I've been imagining myself climbing up Mount Moriah, I've been trying to understand what it means to surrender. I mean, totally surrender to God's will for my life. Believe me, I got a strong desire to control all of that, but I sure want to be open enough to at least glimpse where God is calling me in the next chapter of my life.

What will your own climb up Mount Moriah look like for you? What will you need to surrender to open the channels of grace? What are you going to need to let go of?

You know, in just a moment, we're going to be each invited to make our way up to this particular altar. In just a moment, we're going to be singing a very familiar song as we come to this altar. Will you be able to say, along with Abraham, here I am, Lord, here I am? What will you need to give up? What will you need to let go of? What will you need to surrender to open yourself wide to God's grace?

Amen.