

Pastor T.C. Arnold
5th Sunday in Lent
Genesis 22:1-14
March 18th, 2018

I've preached on the Old Testament text from Genesis 22 many times throughout the years. In fact, I preached on it about three weeks ago for Midweek Lent. I love this story of Abraham and Isaac traveling to Mt. Moriah in faithfulness to God's command. There are so many correlations between Abraham and his son Isaac and the Heavenly Father and His Son Jesus. We talked about them at the Midweek Lenten Service. However, let's review them again and be reminded of how the Bible, from beginning to end, is truly a unified narrative with themes throughout that focus specifically on Christ.

First of all, Abraham had one son whom the text says that he loves. The Father in Heaven has one Son, Jesus... His only begotten Son. Abraham was told to sacrifice to the Lord and express his faithfulness to God. The Heavenly Father did not hold back His Son's sacrifice for the sake of the world. Abraham traveled three days with Isaac to Mt. Moriah. Jesus' journey of three days was after His death on the cross – into hell and then back to life again. Abraham bound his son, a living sacrifice, to the wood Isaac carried up the Mountain himself in order to die according to the Lord's will. Jesus carried His own wood, up a mount, and was bound – living – on it in order to be sacrificed. The place called Mt. Moriah (which means, "the Lord will provide") is the same place they would later build the Lord's temple and call that place, "Mt. Zion" – the same place that the Lord would provide for His people. These similarities are no coincidence. They connect God's promises from the very beginning to today and show us how all things are fulfilled through Jesus who is at the very center of all the Scriptures.

On top of all these important connections there are three additional important topics to consider. First, there is the true and immense faith expressed by Abraham. Secondly, the true and immense faithfulness shown to you by the Lord. And thirdly, on top of all this, through faith and faithfulness, God gives tremendous blessings that are for you. I would like to focus on those three things this morning.

First, let's talk about the faithfulness of Abraham. Who among us could be so faithful? At the command of God he was told to take his son on a journey in order to sacrifice him for the Lord. In faithfulness, he obeyed God's command, though his insides must have been a wreck. However, in faith, as the book of Hebrews explains it, Abraham knew that God never goes back on His promises. His promise was to make a great nation from his seed. It says in Hebrews 11 that Abraham, "*considered that God was able even to raise him from the dead, from which, figuratively speaking, he did receive him back [from the dead].*" Abraham knew God would not go back on His promises. He knew that even if he had to sacrifice his son, that God would bring him back to life – because God already promised, "*Through Isaac shall your offspring be named.*"

Make this example of a trusting faith your own. Be faithful and have faith. No, I don't mean for you to listen to any voice you might hear out there – a voice pretending to be God – and do something you will regret. No, I mean listen to God's Word. He gives His Word of law to show us what to do and not to do. The law shows us, also, how to live for others by demonstrating God's love for the sake of our neighbor. Too often we are "faithful" toward our own deceitful words instead of toward the Word of law. Our ways and words tend to want to "blot out" or "fudge" God's true Word. We love to do this. It helps us rationalize our wrongs. It helps us justify our mishaps. To this end, we show a lack of faithfulness to God when we ignore His Word. This is serious since a lack of faithfulness to God's Word will ultimately affect our faith in Him. Repent of this lack of faithfulness. Turn toward

faithfulness to God's Word – His Word of Law and Gospel for you. For this, we look to faithful Abraham who set aside his own will and yielded, rather, to the will of God.

Secondly, let's consider the faithfulness of God. At first, we might think, "how could God ask Abraham to do such a thing? What kind of God has a man kill his son?" Good question. And here is the answer: God did not allow it. He would not allow Abraham to kill his son. It wasn't allowed. God was testing Abraham. And, God tests your faith as well.

It's hard to make sense out of suffering. We often come to the conclusion that sufferings result from God's intense anger to smite us or, perhaps, His inability to arrange for our comfort. Yet God does not produce sufferings so that His children fall from grace. No, rather, like for Abraham, our troubles call us to a closer relationship with God. They produce a heart of need that seeks the Lord's comfort. And, for Abraham, we can't even imagine what his need must have been like those moments before he bound his son and placed him on that altar.

God is faithful to His promises. He brings us back to Himself; even through our sufferings. We need to only look at what God Himself did in all faithfulness for you. God the Father gave His only begotten son that whoever believes in Him will not perish but have eternal life. He was faithful when He saved Isaac. He is faithful as He saves you!

Third, through faith and faithfulness we see God's tremendous blessings that are for you. Spiritual victory in the time of testing opens the way to additional blessings. Observe the miraculous relief God afforded Abraham in distress. When the patriarch had rendered the desired spiritual sacrifice, the Lord intervened and provided a substitute for the sacrifice, the ram caught by its horns in the thicket. This was such a wonderful deliverance from trouble that "Abraham called the name of that place "Jehovah-jireh," meaning (in better translation than that given in the text): "*In the mount of Yahweh provision is made.*" Here was a mighty revelation of the love and power and providence of God that would undergird Abraham's faith for all the future. We who study the account of God's deliverance of Abraham should expect that the same Lord, with the same mighty power and in the same beneficent providence, can and will come to our rescue in distress – supplying even miraculous assistance if necessary – especially when we appeal in prayer to His promise: "*Call upon Me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify me.*"

God promises His blessings for you. God provides a substitute for sacrifice. You are not the one to be bound on wood, laid on an altar, put to death eternally. You are not the one that will die for yours. No, the substitute will. The blessing for you is in the substitute. It's Jesus. He is the ram caught in the thicket. He is the Lord who took all your sins upon Himself so that you can enjoy the promise that God now saves you. This blessing is for your today, for your tomorrow and for your eternal life. It's yours to have and to share. God's rich blessings, even in the midst of suffering, last eternally... here's why – He promises this for you.

So, as we take into consideration all the ways we see Jesus, even in a story that took place many, many years before the incarnation, the Word of God truly does have just one story to tell. It's all about Jesus. This means, It's all for you. The travel to Mt. Moriah and Mt. Zion... the wood on Isaac's back and Jesus' back, the binding of a living sacrifice... it's all one story and it's all for you. The Lord's blessings be to you today and evermore as we continue our Lenten Journey toward Holy Week together. We are almost there. We will get there... It's God's promise for you!! Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.