



June 27 & 28, 2020
Message: Unforeseen Sacrifices
Pastor Liz Whitford



After these things God tested Abraham. He said to him, "Abraham!" And he said, "Here I am." ² He said, "Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains that I shall show you." ³ So Abraham rose early in the morning, saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him, and his son Isaac; he cut the wood for the burnt offering, and set out and went to the place in the distance that God had shown him. ⁴ On the third day Abraham looked up and saw the place far away. ⁵ Then Abraham said to his young men, "Stay here with the donkey; the boy and I will go over there; we will worship, and then we will come back to you." ⁶ Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering and laid it on his son Isaac, and he himself carried the fire and the knife. So the two of them walked on together. ⁷ Isaac said to his father Abraham, "Father!" And he said, "Here I am, my son." He said, "The fire and the wood are here, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?" ⁸ Abraham said, "God himself will provide the lamb for a burnt offering, my son." So the two of them walked on together. ⁹ When they came to the place that God had shown him, Abraham built an altar there and laid the wood in order. He bound his son Isaac, and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. ¹⁰ Then Abraham reached out his hand and took the knife to kill his son. ¹¹ But the angel of the LORD called to him from heaven, and said, "Abraham, Abraham!" And he said, "Here I am." ¹² He said, "Do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him; for now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me." ¹³ And Abraham looked up and saw a ram, caught in a thicket by its horns. Abraham went and took the ram and offered it up as a burnt offering instead of his son. ¹⁴ So Abraham called that place "The LORD will provide"; as it is said to this day, "On the mount of the LORD it shall be provided."

- Genesis 22:1-14

In April of 2017, I was introduced to the most precious being that I'd ever met. His name was Milo. I was told he was 6 weeks old but found out soon after that he was only 2 weeks old. His mother had abandoned him and the person that found him found 9 others as well. When I first brought him home, he could fit in the palm of my hand. He had to be on formula for a while and he always was full of mischief, except when he cuddled. As time went on, I did what any responsible kitty momma would do, I scheduled his front declawing and his neutering. The problem was the declawing didn't go well. He was in a lot of extra pain and was never the same after that. He began to act up more and no spray bottle could contain the chaos that ensued, and I wasn't home enough to give him all the attention that he wanted. After some deep contemplation, I surrendered him in 2018. He needed someone that wasn't me.

Now, for those of you who aren't pet parents, it may be harder to understand. Milo was my baby. He was the closest thing to a family of my own I had and still have. He would always welcome me with a hug (literally) when I came home from work. I cried the day that I had to let him go, but I knew that it would be better for both him and I. This is the closest that I can come to what Abraham must have felt when he was told that the son that he had waited for an exceptional amount of years, was to be sacrificed to show devotion to God. I know many of you have a clear picture of the agony that would be connected with this experience.

Our story doesn't even illustrate any feelings coming from Abraham. Was Abraham in a trance that would make him unquestionably consider sacrificing his only son that he had waited so long to have? Why wouldn't Abraham fight to save his son? Why would Abraham continue to follow God?

Not to mention the feelings of Isaac. We don't really see any feelings come from Isaac. Can you imagine how the relationship would be broken if it were to happen in today's world. I mean, Abraham would probably be in jail for attempted murder, but it would certainly become an estranged relationship. Yet, we don't see any of that. The trust between Isaac and Abraham, between Isaac and God, continues to be strong, during and after this incident. Maybe we are looking at the story the wrong way.

This Bible story is hard for us to grasp. We see a version of God that we don't like to see. Why would our God request such a thing to someone who followed everything that had been asked of him? Maybe we are looking at this the wrong way.

To start we need to look at the back story.

Abraham had a very faithful relationship with God. He had spent much of his life following blind calls from God. God had called Abraham to leave his family and the place he had known to walk until God told him to stop. Abraham obeyed. This was only the first faithful act that Abraham was called into.

Abraham waited many, many years to have a child, after all his wife was deemed barren. God promised them to have as many descendants as the stars in the sky if they remained faithful. Imagine to Abraham's surprise when God tested Abraham with the one hope for descendants that Abraham had. A test of human faith as we would see it.

It makes us wonder if God only tests with seemingly irrational requests. What we may not realize is God gives us a great test even in the Lord's Prayer. In this well-known prayer by many, we ask God to not put us in testing situations where we must choose between our faith and temptation. "Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil."

We have experienced a year of madness. There has been pandemic not like anything we have seen for over 100 years, a series of events that formed the next civil rights movement, not to mention the threat of murder hornets, horrible fires in Australia, an impeachment process, among many other things. And 2020 is only half over.

We've given up a lot this year. We've given up graduations. We've given up celebrations of many things. We've given up sport seasons. We've given up normal birthdays. We've given up vacations. While none of these may be as substantial as the life of a child, we have felt like we've given up our fair share. We've looked to God in this season and have been faithful in our belief that God will bring us through this. What more could be asked of us? What if I told you this story is not about our response?

This narrative story is not about whether we, as humanity, are faithful even though it seems that way. Instead, it is about God being found faithful. Notice that Abraham seemed to trust that God would provide when the time came. There was no need for pause. There was no hesitation. Before the deed could be done, God provided.

What if our lives are about us paving the way for God to show God's faithfulness? What if we have kept God's faithfulness from showing because we haven't trusted God enough in our situations? These are valid questions for us.

God's faithfulness has been an explosion of outpouring from day 1. The faithfulness of providing for Adam and Eve even with their disobedience. The faithfulness of the many fulfilled promises to Abraham. The faithfulness of God's unconditional love for humanity. The faithfulness of God by sending a version of God's self to teach us how we need to act. There is so much more.

How do we pave the way for God to show God's faithfulness? By this statement, I do not mean that without us God would not be able to show such faithfulness. Rather, I mean by our actions God's faithfulness is fully seen by others. God's faithfulness is always present. It is only when we open our hearts and our minds and let God's words speak through us, that the fullness of faithfulness can be shown.

Our Bible passage today may be one that we can only have seen at the surface level. We may have only seen the utter horror at the request to kill one's own child, and therefore we have skipped over reading it time and time again. God provides though. God's got this. God's faithfulness is always shown.

What important thing are we asked to set aside so that God's faithfulness may be shown in this world right now?

What unforeseen sacrifice are each of us being asked to provide especially in this time of utter madness?



Message from Pastor Markus-

Hello Friends,

- So good to be part of this church service.
- I'm here in our church courtyard at the peace pillar. It was dedicated several years ago during Pastor Doyle's time. I'm thinking about the many things that are happening in our country, our community, our church and in our lives that challenge our peace.
- We all have different passions and ways how to go about challenges:
 - Some of you are great in keeping up with local news and you put great effort into being involved. I'm amazed about the efforts many of you make in volunteering: at Riverview gardens, at the community clothes closet or at Pillars. Some of you participate in justice work, I know some of you were part of the community prayer vigil against racism last Wednesday.
 - Some of you are passionate about issues that transcend the local level. You sponsor a child through Compassion International, World Vision, or other organizations; you support bread for the world or UMCOR.
 - Some of you are not able to volunteer or financially give but you do an awesome job in being kind and in being a positive member of our community.
- Friends, today's theme of Pastor Liz's sermon is "unexpected sacrifice." I'm excited to find out where she is going with this intriguing theme.
- One thing is sure: every good thing you do is a pleasing sacrifice to God and it does make a difference.

Let us pray:

Dear and Holy God,

You have given the greatest sacrifice anyone can imagine: you willingly gave your only son, innocent and perfect, into this guilt-ridden and imperfect world. He lived, he taught, he died a cursed death for our sins and shortcomings.

May we find that this act of your son was an act of compassion, an act of power, an act that gives us compassion and power if only we submit to your presence.

Thank you Jesus for your love, thank you that you show us how we can be good even if we face injustice, hatred and destruction.

Sacrifices hurt, o God. Show us how our personal sacrifices can bring healing to your world, just as you brought healing for us through the sacrifice of your son.

Here us, as we pray his prayer:

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power and the glory forever. Amen.