

**“Blind Faith in a Father”**

Genesis 22:1-14; Matthew 10:40-42

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Last week we celebrated Father’s Day. A day on which we lift up all that is GOOD about our earthly fathers; about the love that they have shown to their children, and how thankful so many of us are for their role in our lives. And speaking of ‘thankful,’ I am definitely ‘thankful’ that today’s passage from Genesis did NOT come up for consideration LAST week. For somehow I think that it might have been challenging to consider how a loving father would be so willing to TAKE his own son’s life on a day that celebrates the manner in which father’s GIVE life to their children.

Being a proud father of 3 children by birth (and 2 by marriage), as well as an *equally* proud grandfather of 9, today’s passage concerning the ‘test’ of Abraham’s faith is perhaps the one I struggle with the MOST of any in our 3 year cycle of Scriptures. That God would ask Abraham to **“Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom** (‘by the way!’) **you love, and go... and offer him as a burnt offering”** ... and that, by all that we are told in the narrative, he without hesitation proceeded to fulfill God’s request... is REALLY hard for me to fathom. Not only that God would put Abraham to such a test, but that he could comply so willingly, seemingly without reservation? It is just so hard to imagine such ‘blind faith in a father’...

It is hard for me to comprehend a faith in God that was SO strong that you would be willing to kill (also translated ‘slaughter’) your very own flesh and blood. (Of course, we see far too much of parents taking their children’s lives these days, but those are NOT at the request of God. Rather, a much more sinister voice speaking...) However, just last week did not God the Father’s very own Son say that a father that loved a son more than God was not worthy of Him? Would Abraham’s actions not support such a primary love and allegiance to God above all others?

So, let us give thought to what the actions of Abraham... as well as the words of Jesus... have to say to us about OUR faith. About what sacrifices that WE would be willing to make to demonstrate our trust in God. The Word of God that can be at once 'terrifying,' and 'sanctifying,' and 'life-giving.' How the 'blind faith in a father' (little 'f') relate to 'blind faith in a Father' (capital 'F').

I would start by saying that I don't believe that Abraham was as 'blind' as we might be led to believe. As Samantha and I were discussing in our worship planning this week, we agreed that there is much more to this story than has made it onto our Bible pages. As LONG as Abe and Sara struggled to have children, and then were given that 'laughable' moment when God finally, in their 90's, blessed them with Isaac (whose name means 'laughter'), should we think that Abraham would take this traumatic request of God's *lightly? Cavalierly?* I DON'T THINK SO!

I would have to believe that his heart was heavy when he went home to prepare for the day ahead. For Abraham, **THE STRUGGLE WAS REAL!** That he tossed and turned all night, agonizing over what was being asked of him. That as he packed for the journey, and traveled those many miles, he anguished over what was to happen. From the time that the innocent 'lamb' Isaac asked about where the sacrificial one was, to blinding him up and putting him on that altar, to the point of picking up the murder weapon, Abraham's eyes had to be filled with tears at the thought of losing his only son. Particularly at this own hands. But that through all those emotional, gut-wrenching hours, he kept on praying those Hebrew words of assurance: "*Jehovah Jireh.*" "*The Lord will provide.*" (Repeat)

WHAT exactly would the Lord 'provide?' A way out? An 'escape clause?' Perhaps. Or, if he did have to carry through with this sacrifice, perhaps God would provide another child, in the same miraculous way He did before. Or, at least, would provide some type of solace and comfort at the loss of their son. Even though

Abraham may not have understood the 'WHY' of what he was being subjected to, he had to continue to believe that that the Lord who had provided so much for him throughout his life would continue to. Was Abraham's trust in God a 'Blind faith?' No. In TRUTH, the eyes of his HEART were WIDE open...

Because of Abraham's belief that God would provide, even in the darkest hours of his real struggle, he was WILLING to serve Him in whatever way he was called upon. He was AVAILABLE to the call of God. Either 'directly' from God, or 'indirectly' through God's creation. Look at how often we heard Abraham utter the phrase, "**Here I am.**" In response to **God**. In response to **Isaac**. In response to the **angel**. "**Here I am.**" This is perhaps one of the more powerful statements that we TOO can make to **God**... to our **family**... to those 'strangels' (stranger/angels) we may encounter... "Here I am." Perhaps a sentence that should be immediately followed by "**How can I help?**"

I am reminded of a member of the Welsh church who is our only substitute accompanist. Tho she doesn't live in the Welsh 'metroplex' 😊... she actually lives in Carencro. Nearly an hour away. But whenever I may text her to see if she's available, it usually takes about a minute or two... no, really... for her response. 'Sure.' 'No problem.' 'Happy to do it.' NO hesitation. She is always 'WILLING' to serve. Always 'AVAILABLE.' Is it a BIG sacrifice? No. Nothing like sacrificing a child. But that's not the point. It's the willing heart thing. That people know that you are ready and willing to serve. That you are 'available.' 'Here I am.' 'How can I help?'

Which brings me to the last point I would like to make. Our sacrifice to God takes many forms. Very few will ever take on the magnitude of the one Abraham was asked to make. Not that some won't. Many of you hearing the sound of my voice have had to make the ultimate sacrifice of a son, or daughter, or other close family relative. Perhaps in the military, or in law enforcement. Or to 'natural,' or

‘un-natural’ causes. Sacrifices that you weren’t given much choice in the matter, as was Abraham.

But most of the sacrifices we are called to make come in much less ‘spectacular’... or ‘traumatic’... occasions. **SACRIFICES COME IN VARIOUS WAYS.** And that is where I would lift up that brief passage we read from Matthew’s Gospel. I will say that when I read it, what really caught my eye was the reference to **“little ones.”** Of course, in reading about the potential sacrifice of Abraham and Sarah’s ‘little one,’ I thought of this reading in THAT context.

But what really put this passage in a different, and more helpful, light was to read it in another translation. Now, I know that for some of you purists, only the ‘original’ KJV... ‘King *Jesus* Version’... will do. But let me read for you the take from fellow Presbyterian minister, the late Eugene Peterson, in his translation, The Message:

***“We are intimately linked in this harvest work. Anyone who accepts what you do, accepts me, the One who sent you. Anyone who accepts what I do accepts my Father, who sent me. Accepting a messenger of God is as good as being God’s messenger. Accepting someone’s help is as good as giving someone help. This is a large work I’ve called you into, but don’t be overwhelmed by it. It’s best to start small. Give a cool cup of water to someone who is thirsty, for instance. The smallest act of giving or receiving makes you a true apprentice. You won’t lose out on a thing.” (Matthew 10:40-42)***

Of course, Peterson had me at ‘harvest work.’ Like my favorite alarm reminds me every day at 10:02 (as in *Luke 10:2*), ***“the harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few...therefore, ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers for the harvest.”*** But, as we work at being faithful laborers at bringing in the ‘plentiful harvest’ into these ‘SILOS’ called ‘churches.’ Now, I know that I am much less an

expert on agricultural matters than most of my friends at the Welsh church, but in my simplistic way, is not a 'silo' a place that receives a product that has been processed... changed, modified... which is then stored, held on to for a little while, and then is redistributed, sent out to where it can be used? Does that not also describe the 'church?' A place where we are changed, modified... held onto for a little while... and then sent out to be used by God. Hmmm... Just some 'food for thought'...

Regardless, let us take to heart some of what this translation says about what it means to BE the 'faithful' CHURCH:

***"We are intimately linked in this harvest work."*** (Matthew 10:40) C'mon. Doesn't that sound a whole lot more 'sexy' than 'we go to church together?' I invite you to repeat this with me: ***"We are intimately linked in this harvest work."*** Then there's the ***"Accepting God's messenger is as good as being God's messenger."*** As important as it is to SPEAK about God's love for you to others, it is also just as important to LISTEN to others about God's love for YOU! Remember that 'holy ratio' of ears to mouth...that we should listen twice as much as we talk/ What perhaps unlikely 'messenger' may God be sending to you... even today?

Then it says that ***"Accepting someone's help is as good as giving someone help."*** How many of us can GIVE someone help MUCH more easily than ACCEPTING someone's help? As much as I just preached to say 'Here I am... How can I help?', our ability to actually HELP them depends on their willingness to ACCEPT it. We should remember that ourselves... [one finger pointing out is also three pointing back.]

And finally, on those occasions we might get intimidated by the magnitude of God's call on our 'puny little lives,' perhaps this will help. Jesus says ***"This is a large work I've called you into, but don't be overwhelmed by it. It's best to start small."***

***Give a cool cup of water to someone who is thirsty, for instance. The smallest act of giving or receiving makes you a true apprentice. You won't lose out on a thing.***  
(10:41-2)

What's that ancient proverb... *"The journey of a 1000 miles begins with a single step."*? The sacrifices that we make ... the acts of kindness we do... usually *aren't* 'front page news.' But usually buried way back in Sec. B of 'The Jerusalem Press.' ***"It's best to start small."*** 'Slow and steady wins the race.' Just giving a cool cup of water... or a brief text message/emoji... or a 'smile behind the mask'... can mean so much. ***"The smallest act of giving or receiving makes you a true apprentice. You won't lose out on a thing."***

So, here's the bottom line for today's interpretation of God's Word:  
**God calls.** Just like He did to Abraham. Sometimes that call will be very hard. Sometimes not as much. But regardless, **the struggle will be real.** And we must be **willing to respond.** To be **available** to God, and God's children. It won't be easy. But we need to hold onto that belief of Abraham's. *Jehovah Jireh.* **"The Lord will provide."** That just as God provided a substitute for the sacrifice of Abraham's son Isaac, so do did he provide one for our death: HIS VERY OWN SON. An excruciating experience that perhaps our Heavenly Father also had to turn a 'blind eye' to... knowing that because of His Son's sacrifice, we, also his precious children, 'would not lose out on a thing.' To our loving Heavenly Father be all the glory and honor, wisdom and power, now and forevermore. AMEN!