

God has provided

Thirteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

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I want you to think for a moment of the Old Testament reading this morning - the story of God testing Abraham by asking him to sacrifice his son Isaac on Mount Moriah.

It is a shocking story. And people today, as in centuries gone by, have problems with it,

- problems with understanding it,
- problems with accepting it,
- problems with interpreting it.

Scholars have debated and marvelled over this story throughout the centuries, just as have ordinary people like you and I. Indeed the tale - told as a story about God and about Abraham and about God and you and I evokes for us all some very deep feelings.

- Did God really ask Abraham to sacrifice his son upon an altar?
- How could God ask that?
- What kind of God would ask that?

The feelings that we have - they fuel our questions - our debate:

- Our sense of horror as Abraham sets on his trek - Isaac beside him.
- The awful suspense when, near to the end of that trek, we hear Isaac address his father, saying:
"Father, the fire and the wood are here, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?" And we hear Abraham respond with what seems to be an awful lie, saying, "God himself will provide the lamb for a burnt offering, my son."
- Our sense of relief when as the knife is about to descend - God speaks and stays Abraham's hands and indeed provides the sacrifice for the altar which Abraham has built.

A lot of feelings and a lot of thoughts are evoked by this story: thoughts and feelings about God and thoughts and feelings about Abraham.

- What kind of Father was Abraham?
- What kind of man could offer up his own son?
- Should he really be held up as a model of faith for us all?

Powerful, potent, questions. Powerful, potent, feelings.

And yet consider. Consider in the midst of your thoughts and feelings the story for what is - for what it purports to be with its opening line: "After these things God tested Abraham." We may not understand why God tested Abraham, but do we not understand that fact that tests come to us? Do we not pray each day as Jesus taught us "Save us from the time of trial but deliver us from evil?"

What faith had this man - this man whose son came from God by a promise?

What faith had this man - who, as he leads that son towards what seems to be his certain death, says to him when asked about the lamb for the sacrifice - "God will provide"?

Would that we would never have this trial, this test.

Would that no one would ever ask of us - in the name of God - to give up our children.

But would that we would be like Abraham, able to trust God that far, that much; would that we would be like Abraham and be able to say: "God will provide."

But the story is not for me just about Abraham's faith. It is about God and what God does.

In Abraham's giving up of his son, something marvellous happens. His son comes back to him. God provides the sacrifice - as Abraham tells Isaac he will. We have no way of knowing just what Abraham meant by that comment he made to Isaac, what it is that Abraham expected to happen - or to not happen, but the fact is, that in this tale of Abraham, we see something new about God emerge.

We see a God unlike the gods of Abraham's neighbours - those who not only demanded the sacrifice of the firstborn from time to time but took the sacrifice and gave nothing back for it.

The God of Abraham provided the sacrifice.

The God whom Jesus believed in did not let Abraham down.

The God who was the father of Jesus showed that despite the awfulness of the test he set Abraham, he was a God who could be trusted utterly.

The scripture says, "After all these things" - after all that Abraham and Sarah and Lot and his wife had experienced from the hand of God over many years, "God put Abraham to the test".

We don't know why.

We may not approve of the kind of test it was.

But in the midst of it - God provided.

The story of Abraham does not end with Isaac being restored however. For the God who asked Abraham to give up his son - and who then gave the son back to him, ends up giving up his own son, giving him up out of love for us - as Abraham was prepared to give up Isaac out of love for God.

And in the process of God giving up his son Jesus for us - something marvellous happens. His son comes back to him - as did Abraham's. He comes back to him and in coming back to him, brings to God all of us - each one of you here today.

God has provided.

The story of Abraham is the story of God.

And it is our story.

The God of Jesus, who said "Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me" has provided - and will provide.

The God of Jesus, who said, "Whoever does not take up the cross and follow me is not worthy of me" has provided and will provide.

Loving God more than we love ourselves - more than we love our family is not easy. Taking up a cross - it is not pleasant - it is work - indeed it is work unto death, but you have provided and will provide. And no other god does that.

God - the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jesus, provides.

And more.

We see God do what no other god has done, what no idol, no demon, no power, that hold the misguided in thrall has done. We see God give up his own son rather than demand the sons of those who worship Him.

God provided the sacrifice for Abraham.

And God provides the sacrifice for us as well.

A sacrifice, made on our behalf - once and for all, forever. That is part of the meaning of the table spread before us this morning.

We celebrate God having provided the perfect sacrifice. We celebrate God giving back to us not only our children and their children after them, but God giving back to us the very life that we owe to him.

There is a mystery to God. A mystery to Christ.

His suffering redeems our suffering and through him, our suffering also redeems the world.

People can talk and debate and argue about what God might or might not expect of us - they can go on for hours about how a loving God would never ask Abraham to give us Isaac - they can even cast doubt upon the necessity of Jesus dying upon the cross so that our sins might be forgiven. They can and they will.

And much of the debate is good.

But good - or bad - the fundamental fact is that in the situation in which Abraham found himself - and in the situations in which we find ourselves- God has provided and will provide - now and forever.

My God is a mystery. But my God is a mystery of love. A mystery of love that calls me to give up all that I treasure - even myself - and then provides to me something that is such much better.

May your God be the same to you. May your God be the God of Abraham and Isaac - the God of Jacob and of Jesus - both now - and forevermore..

AMEN

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