

5th Sunday in Lent
Texts: Gen 22:1-14; Heb 11:17-19
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April 2, 2017

Resurrection Faith

Today's Old Testament lesson is probably one of the most recognized and well-known accounts in all of Scripture. **EVERYONE** knows the account of Abraham offering up his only beloved son as a sacrifice in obedience to God and His Word. God commands, and Abraham obeys, even when it means doing the *unthinkable*—sacrificing your own son. Not surprisingly, whenever someone wants to offer up an example of profound faith and trust in God, they point to this event. *Makes sense, right?* This is about as profoundly faithful as you can get. We are to look to Abraham and learn from his example. He trusted in God. When God told him to sacrifice his own son, he didn't *focus group* it or run it by anyone else first to see what they thought about it. *"Am I crazy? Is it just me? God wants me to sacrifice Isaac. I don't know.... What do you think I should do?"* I don't care who you are, any sane person would hear that and say, *"NO! Don't do it! This is your own flesh and blood!"* Can you imagine if Abraham told Sarah (his wife) what he was about to do? *"You're what?! Over my dead body! I'll kill you myself before I let you kill my precious Isaac!"*

Abraham believed God—period. God commanded, and Abraham obeyed. *Did it pain him?* I'm sure it did. I'm sure he was torn up inside as he was making that three-day journey to the mountain that God commanded him to go to so that he could do the unimaginable. This wasn't a spur-of-the-moment thing. He had three days to stew on this...and he kept on. I can only imagine how his stomach must've sunk when that mountain came into view and it was time to leave the servants behind and make that walk up to the top. I can't even begin to imagine what was going through his mind when he bundled all the wood needed for the sacrifice on his son's back. I can't even begin to imagine how he kept it together when Isaac asked so innocently, "Dad, we have the fire and we have the wood, but we don't have an animal. Where's the lamb for the burnt offering?" The tears welling up, the shortness of breath, and the dagger to the heart he must've felt when answering, "God will provide, my son." And yet...he kept on.

And here's where it gets really interesting. We're never told anywhere that Abraham filled Isaac in on the specifics of what was going on. All we know is that Abraham told the young man (who was probably a mature teenager by this point, given the fact that he's carrying a bunch of wood on his back) that "God will provide." And yet...when it comes time for sacrifice, Isaac is bound up and placed on the altar. I mention the age of Isaac for very good reason. Isaac was a teenage boy, full of vitality and vigor, no doubt very strong. Dad, on the other hand, was on the north side of 115 years old. *Sound like a fair fight to you? Does that sound like a coin-flip; it could go either way?* And yet...Isaac is bound and placed on the altar.

Folks: Here is something so often overlooked! Isaac, too, had the same profound faith of his father. The writer to the Hebrews tells us in 11:17-19 that Abraham fully believed that God would raise Isaac from the dead. ***Did you catch that?*** We even hear Abraham proclaim this faith when he tells his servants to “*wait here, and we [the boy and I] will go and worship and then we will return.*” It’s not that Abraham had some blind generic faith that believed that God would do ***something***, but it was a very specific, focused faith on God’s promise that his offspring that would outnumber the sands of the seashore and the stars in the sky ***would come from Isaac***. God said it...many time over the course of twenty-five years, and Abraham trusted God. If God told him to kill his son, Abraham believed that God would raise him from the dead, ***because Isaac still had children to bear***. God’s promise **could not and would not** die with Isaac. Abraham believed it...and so did Isaac.

The son of this faithful father trusted his father, and more specifically (and importantly) ***trusted the Word and promise of God*** that his father had handed down to him and taught him and raised him to believe. At some point the light bulb clicked on for Isaac, and he realized that God did indeed provide the sacrifice, ***and he was it***. And yet Isaac didn’t object or put up a fight or try to flee in order to save his life. He didn’t try to strike a bargain or come up with a different plan. Isaac didn’t go to that altar kicking and screaming and fighting for his life. ***He went willingly***. Isaac wasn’t bound up against his will. He **allowed** his father to bind his hands and feet. He allowed his father; yea, even ***worked with*** his father in constructing the altar, carrying the wood up that mountain on his back and then getting himself situated atop that altar, bound up to do his father’s (and his Father’s) will.

I know by now (or at least I hope by now) you’re picking up on the very clear typological foreshadowing of Christ Jesus, the only-begotten Son of the Father, who bore the wood of sacrifice upon His back, and who was ultimately lifted up and sacrificed by His Father upon that blood-soaked wooden altar. It’s so beautiful and powerful, isn’t it? ***And there’s more! It gets better!*** It really is amazing to see how God is working in this account when you get into the original Hebrew language. So much is lost in translation. ***So much falls through the cracks of time and culture***. In this account with Abraham and Isaac, God was actually preparing His people to see and behold Him, and I don’t mean this in just a spiritual/sentimental kind of way. God was ***truly*** prepping His people for the future!

Mt. Moriah...do you know where it stands? ***It’s in Jerusalem***. Think about that. God was leading Abraham on a three-day journey to Jerusalem to put his only-beloved son to death on a very specific hilltop that He had chosen. For centuries Rabbis have insisted that Mt. Moriah is where the Temple eventually came to be situated (and is now a Muslim mosque), not because they think that’s

where Abraham offered up Isaac in sacrifice, but because 2 Chronicles says that God appeared to David on the threshing floor that was atop a mountain in the range of Moriah. **This isn't that hilltop, though.** Why? It comes down to translation and letting God's Word do the talking. So often our English translates the phrase "*Yahweh Yirah*" as "God provides," which is what you see in verse 14. This translation is made as a way of book-ending the text and providing proof of Abraham's answer to Isaac, *but that's not what it says!* The Hebrew phrase is *best* translated as "God sees/is seen."

Okay...wouldn't that apply to God and His presence in the Temple? Yes, but there is another hill, just outside of the Temple confines, overlooking the Temple, as a matter of fact, that is also part of this same mountain group known as Moriah. ***This particular Moriah hilltop is where Christ Jesus was lifted up and sacrificed for all mankind.*** On this specific hilltop, which God Himself led His only-begotten Son to, carrying not only the wood of the cross upon His back, but all the sins of the world for all time, the only-begotten and beloved Son of the Father was willingly bound up with all the sins of mankind, willingly shedding His blood for our salvation; willingly shedding His blood in *humble obedience* to His Father and *unconditional, unquestioning love for us*. In that bloody hilltop sacrifice the fiery wrath of the Father burned against all sin for all time, consuming this precious Paschal Lamb of God, who though He was sinless, was made to become a whole-burnt offering of sin so that God's all-consuming and justly-deserved wrath would pass over us and spare us and save us.

Did God provide the Lamb for sacrifice? Yes. This is undoubtedly the case. But...more than that, HERE is where God is seen! ***Here is "Yahweh Yirah."*** Here is where God Himself *first* saw, the Angel of the Lord, the pre-incarnate Christ, coming to Abraham and stopping him before Isaac's blood was shed. "*Now I see.... Now I yirah.*" This isn't just any angel talking. If so, then it would say, "*Now God sees....*" No! "*Now I see....*" This is the Angel of Yahweh—Christ in the form of an angel, which is one of the ways He physically dwelt with and interacted with His Old Testament people. Twenty centuries later that same God-in-the-flesh would be lifted up for all the world to see; ***to see the wrath of God against sin, and to see the love of God for the sinner.*** Here is where Yahweh is truly yirah'd; ***where almighty God is truly seen***—atop this blessed hilltop, atop this bloody altar. God is love, right? Here is that love, made flesh for you and hung on a cross for you.

And that's how we're going to end today—by focusing on and looking to Christ Jesus, the Paschal Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world. I direct your eyes, your ears...your faith to this exalted Savior. I direct you, ***not to a specific mountaintop locale and a past-tense moment in ancient history***, but to your Savior, who dwells with and abides with you this very day. The cross is long-since gone. The blood, the gore, the darkness, the pain, the sorrow...it is

finished...once and for all time.
and for all time.

But...that's just it. It is finished, once

Jesus made that “perfect tense” proclamation (*tetelestai*) from that wretched hilltop blood-soaked cross on that dark day almost two thousand years ago, but that cry of victory spans **all of eternity**. He spoke it once, for all time and all people. The fruits and spoils of that eternal hilltop victory, first recognized *three days later* when the tomb was found empty and the resurrected Christ appeared to His beloved disciples, holding out His pierced hands and bidding them “peace,” are *still* recognized, received, and celebrated today. This same God and Lord is still seen today, seen through the eyes of faith, seen and recognized ***right where He directs us to look; right where He promises to be—in His Holy Word, in His Holy Baptism, and in His life-giving Sacrament of Body and Blood.***

This, my fellow children of promise, is where saving faith—the same faith Abraham passed down and taught to Isaac; the same faith all Christians have had since hearing God first promise this sacrificial victory to a serpent in the Garden on that day so very long ago—***looks to and sees almighty God.*** This is where true comfort and peace is rightly recognized and understood. ***Where do you look for peace? What kind of peace are you looking for?*** Here it is. Here is Christ. Here is His peace—His blood-bought peace—which surpasses all understanding.

May God grant you the same humble obedience of faith that He granted to your great-grandfather of the faith so that you, too, may ever and always see and hear and recognize and rejoice with all the angels, archangels, and company of heaven; all the saints.

In Christ's Name...AMEN