

Sermon Notes - May 10, 2020
(Genesis 22:1-19)

Our reading today is one about God's faithfulness and provision and Abraham's obedience. God had promised a son to Abraham and Sarah in their old age. Up until this time, Sarah had been childless, but at age 90, she and Abraham, at age 99, had a child of God's promise named Isaac. One day, according to our reading, God told Abraham to go to a place he would show him to worship and to offer his son, Isaac as a sacrifice. Can't you imagine Abraham's thoughts and feelings at this moment - "God, you can't be asking me to give up the son you promised that would bring descendants of me and be your special people?" But our reading doesn't say that Abraham argued, debated, or questioned God. He obeyed - he took Isaac, his two servants, a donkey and supplies and went to Mount Moriah. (*Now keep in mind Mount Moriah was a 3-day journey; it was later the place where King Solomon rebuilt the temple and centuries later on this area where Jesus would be crucified at Golgotha.*) When Abraham gets near Mount Moriah, he tells his servants to stay with the donkey - "Isaac and I will go there. We will worship and we will come back." (Abraham is either hoping or trusting God will let him keep his son, Isaac.) **Please know that it was never God's intention for Abraham to take the life of his son.** (In the book of Leviticus, it tells us that God hated human sacrifice - *pagan religions of that day often sacrificed children.*)

God was testing Abraham - to see if Abraham's trust in God was as much as his deep love for his only son, Isaac - the son of God's promise. God was testing Abraham's trust and obedience in Him. God will not give you and I the same test as he did Abraham - and I can't explain why He had this particular test for Abraham. **But, God will test you and me.** **Adversity, difficulties, challenges, and tests will come to all of us as followers of Christ.** ***(When you reflect back on your life, when are the times you have grown and matured the most - are they not during the difficult times rather than the easy times?)_ When are times your faith has been tested or challenged or you found it difficult to believe or to pray?***

It is easy to believe in God when things are going well and pretty smooth for us. It is in the trying times that we grow and struggle and mature the most.

Someone once said, "People are a lot like a tea bag; you never know its strength until you put it in hot water." Isn't that true of us? The difficult challenges and adversities of life cause us to draw upon every ounce of strength and faith we can muster.

**Why does God test us? I think to mold and develop our character and to increase our capacity to trust God more deeply.*

Let me share a story about our character being refined: I read a story about Frances Perkins, who worked as the Secretary of Labor for President Franklin D. Roosevelt's administration. She said she knew FDR when he was a young man even before working in his administration. He was the privileged son of a rich and prominent family in Hyde Park (outside Chicago, Illinois). He attended and graduated from Harvard University. He was always a cocky and arrogant young man until he was stricken with polio and paralysis. She said, "I watched him be transformed by his polio - he developed a heart of tenderness and a soul of compassion for others." Adversity and challenges can do that to us, can't it? God wants to grow us into mature disciples who deeply trust Him in all things. Sometimes that means things happen in life and we are challenged to lean on, to depend, and to trust God to see us through it.

I want you to notice something else in this story and that is - when Abraham and Isaac got to the top of the mountain to worship, Isaac said, "Father, we have the wood and the fire, but where's the sacrifice (the ram)?" Notice what Abraham said to his son, "**The Lord will provide** the ram for the sacrifice." (I don't know if that was wishful thinking or his positive, trusting faith in God.) But, God did provide the ram. It was like one of those Indiana Jones movies - at the moment of decision, when Abraham is about ready to offer his son on the altar, the angel of the

Lord tells Abraham not to touch his son – look in the bushes. There’s a ram caught in the thorns. Wow! The Lord provided!

Twenty-years ago, Dr. Olds, a minister friend, served a church in Hartsville, SC. One of the families in the church was a young couple expecting their second child. It was a little boy and they named him Allen. Allen was born with Down’s Syndrome and also with a heart with no partitions in it. If the little boy survived six months, the doctors would transfer him to a hospital in Birmingham, Alabama and do major heart surgery. They did not know if the little boy would survive, but he did and he grew and flourished. About a year later, Dr. Olds moved to another church out of town. Judy, the mother of Allen, discovered where Dr. Olds’ was ministering. It had been many years since Dr. Olds had heard from the family, but Judy wanted Dr. Olds to know about her son’s progress.

In a letter she wrote, “Allen is now a senior in high school, graduating in June. He was voted ‘Senior of the Year.’ He just got a part-time job at the local grocery. He was awarded his Eagle Scout last year. He is active in church and is so loved at school and at the grocery store. If you remember when he was born, my husband and I were young (mid-20’s) and we had no idea if we could provide for Allen – financially, emotionally, and every way. We were scared and afraid, but you kept saying, ‘The Lord will provide what you need’ – and He did. I can’t imagine my life without Allen in it. He has brought such joy to our family and continues to do so. ‘The Lord will provide and He does!’ Thank you, Pastor!”

I wonder if we teach our kids and grandkids that “The Lord will provide” – love, forgiveness, strength, courage – that God’s grace is sufficient for every need? *Do we pray in times of need and if God doesn’t answer as soon as we want or the way we want, how do we deal with it?

There is a third thing I hope you’ll see in this story and that is, God wants us “to trust Him”. A few years ago a little 5-year-old girl and her

father were caught upstairs in a burning fire in their house. The father knew he had to save his little daughter, and the only way to do that was to knock out a window and jump to the ground and then ask his daughter to jump. He knocked out the window, jumped to the ground, got up, and yelled to his daughter to jump and daddy would catch her. She said, "Daddy, I can't see you." He said, "Honey, that's okay. Jump. Daddy can see you and will catch you." "But, I can't see you, daddy. The smoke is in my way." Daddy again told her to jump and he'd catch her - "trust me," he said. Finally, after the third time, the little girl jumped and trusted daddy to catch her - even though she couldn't see daddy for the smoke. And daddy caught her.

Another story of trust: Several years ago, a Methodist minister friend lost his brother-in-law, Randy to cancer in his late 40's. Randy was diagnosed with cancer at age 43. He was an emotional wreck when he first got the diagnosis. He became depressed and discouraged and overwhelmed. But he remembered when he was a young teenager, he would often go up in the north Georgia mountains to talk with God when he had a heavy heart and confusion. One day, when he was so stressed about his cancer, he said that he laid down at home and fell asleep. He dreamed he was back in the Georgia mountains and he went to the sight where he prayed and relaxed as a teenager - but in his dream, he was a five-year-old boy and when he got there, Jesus was already there with outstretched arms waiting for him. He jumped into Jesus' arms and Jesus held him tight for the longest time. When Jesus let me go and put me down, he looked in my face and said two words, "Trust me". All of a sudden, I awoke from my dream and I knew I would be okay, no matter if I beat this illness and lived on earth with my family or if I died and went to heaven to live with Jesus. Jesus was telling me to lean on him, to trust His love and provision for me. And I did from that moment on!

Jesus wants us to trust Him, even when we can't see and our human logic makes us doubt. He will be there. His promises are true and He is faithful to His promises to you and me. As we conclude this Old Testament lesson today, may we remember that we'll all be tested in our faith at some time in our lives - God wants to develop our character and

increase and deepen our capacity to trust Him. The Lord will provide – His grace is sufficient for our needs. God keeps His promises to be with us, to walk with us through the good and the bad, to love and forgive, etc.

***Can you hear Him saying, “Trust me,” even when you don’t see or understand?** Amen.