

Sunday 28th June 2026 – Family Service

Genesis 22:1-14

Psalm 13

Romans 6:12-23

Matthew 10:40-42

I would like to repeat the words of our Collect for today: “Faithful God; your love stands firm from generation to generation: open our hearts to hear your word that we may seek Christ’s presence in everyone we meet...”

The scriptures and the tradition and teaching of the church tell us that God is faithful and that God is loving. We see this in the way that God made that incredible sacrifice for us by sending his Son, Jesus Christ, to die for us on the cross. Not only that but God defeated death through the resurrection of Jesus giving us the promise of eternal life. When Jesus left, he promised that the gift of the Holy Spirit would be given to all believers. So, we received this guide for our lives – the advocate the comforter, the counsellor, the friend.

This faithful and loving God, who is Father, Son, and Holy spirit, calls us into a personal relationship with him, asking us to have faith and to trust him, believe in his promises, and follow him.

This, however, is not always so easy to do. (Bible study comment) I very often struggle with my own faith and have many questions for God.

I do however believe that some form of sacrifice is needed on our part to enter into this relationship with God, and so I would like to look at the issue of sacrifice.

The story that we heard from Genesis is called the “sacrifice of Isaac” in Christian circles and in Judaism is known as the “akedah” or “the binding of Isaac”. It is a story that raises many questions: is this the story of an abusive God, or of a misguided Abraham? Is this religious violence of the worst kind, or is this a story of faith and obedience? The writer to the Hebrews in chapter 11 sees this episode as a significant example of faith against all odds.

No story has puzzled people of the faith more than this story. Why would a loving God test a man’s faith with the sacrifice of his son? The whole incident seems almost bizarre. I can’t imagine being in a situation where I was asked to sacrifice one of my children.

Apparently, some scholars believe that the voice that told Abraham to slay his son was not the voice of God. Perhaps Abraham was listening to the voice of the local culture. You see - At that time human sacrifice was still a common practice in some cultures in the area. Maybe God wanted this story here to make a statement that human sacrifice was all wrong and therefore intervened to stop it.

I suppose that is a possibility, but I think it may be just another way of rationalizing the story to somehow make sense of what happened.

Since when does God make sense? Remember this is the same God who gave a son to Abraham and Sarah in their old age. That story was irrational – almost absurd, just as this one is.

In our limited understanding, sometimes God seems irrational and the voice of God sometimes calls us to irrationality. This was the same God who told Noah to build an ark on dry land. This is the same God that will lead the Israelites through the Red Sea. This is the same God that sent his Son, to be born as a helpless baby in the little obscure town of Bethlehem.

The God of irrationality puts Abraham to this horrific test. Fortunately, Abraham passes the test, and the story had a happy ending. God's test of Abraham had to be one where there could be no question about his faith. God needed Abraham as a leader and God had to determine whether or not Abraham was up to the test.

But Abraham is not acting on blind faith. God has already demonstrated the impossible by giving him Isaac, his first-born son, and followed through on that promise. God made a covenant with Noah and promised Abraham land and descendants.

This story is difficult for us to comprehend since it appears to put Abraham's son, Isaac, in grave danger. I don't believe that God ever intended that any harm would come to Isaac. God could have intervened at any point along the way. Why God created this scenario seems almost offensive to us, but then sometimes the only way God can get our attention is to do the impossible, the irrational, the ridiculous.

When people ask me why I'm in the ministry, I look back and often wonder myself. If you had said to me in my early years that I would be in any form of ministry, I would have laughed at you. However – here I am.

What Abraham demonstrated in this story is a complete surrender of the will. Abraham proceeded as instructed, without hesitation, without complaining, without debate. Abraham accepted the challenge and ultimately passed his test.

We wonder why Abraham would even listen to this irrational call from God. But I think that it never occurred to Abraham that God would not provide for him. Abraham proceeded because he trusted in God completely. Notice that Abraham responded to God by saying, "Here I am." He was ready and willing as he responded to the call.

For Abraham, there were no excuses. There is no other agenda. God called, Abraham responded. He prepared himself for the journey and set off into the wilderness. He didn't look at his appointment book or ask his family if they had plans. He didn't have to think it over or sleep on it. He didn't say, "I'll get back to you." He didn't say, "You know I'd really like to, but..."

What God wanted was Abraham's absolute commitment and unqualified faith and Abraham came through with flying colours.

Notice also that when Isaac questioned his father about the lamb, Abraham told him (verse 8) that "God would provide the lamb for the burnt offering." He also says later in verse 5 to his servants: "Stay here with the donkey while I and the boy go over there. We will worship and then **we will come back to you.**" Abraham had complete faith in God that whatever resources were necessary for the mission would be provided. There was no reason to worry since God would provide for all his needs.

Finally, it is not enough that Abraham just believed in God. Abraham has to make the journey; he has to go the distance. This is illustrated by the fact that they travel for three days. And God didn't intervene until the very last moment when Abraham reached for the knife.

God had seen enough. God was convinced that Abraham could be trusted. For it was then that the angel of God said, "For now I know that you fear God."

Are we willing to go the distance for our faith? Are we willing to make sacrifices for our faith? For Abraham, going the distance meant taking a test which could have had dire consequences. It meant trusting in God, who in the past had made extraordinary requests from other leaders of the faith, like Noah. It meant believing that God would provide all of his needs. It meant that the God of irrationality would call him to other ridiculous tasks in the future.

I think that Abraham **did** make a sacrifice on that mountain. I think that Abraham sacrificed his own personal needs and will by being obedient to God.

Are we up to such a test? I believe that most of us are creatures of habit and strive to be comfortable with the status quo. We don't like change. We don't like it when we are asked to do things "outside the box." We don't want to be different. We don't want to be known as people who do crazy things. We don't like risks and we don't like to lose. Most of us would rather go through life without any kind of testing or challenges.

God wants us to have faith and to support that faith with commitment. God wants us to trust that God will provide for us in the future just as God has provided for us in the past. God wants us to heed the call to service even when the voice we hear seems to make no sense. This will entail sacrifice.

In *The Jesus Storybook Bible*, by Sally Lloyd-Jones, the conclusion of this story in Genesis is framed beautifully as follows:

“As they sat there on the mountaintop, watching the embers of the fire die in the cool night air, the stars above them sparkling in the velvet sky, God helped Abraham and Isaac understand something. God wanted his people to live, not die. God wanted to rescue his people, not punish them. But they must trust him. ‘One day, Someone will be born into your family,’ God promised them. ‘And he will bring happiness to the whole world.’ God was getting ready to give the whole world a wonderful present. It would be God’s way to tell his people, ‘I love you.’ Many years later, another Son would climb another hill, carrying wood on his back. Like Isaac, he would trust his Father and do what his Father asked. He wouldn’t struggle or run away.

Who was he? He was God’s Son, his only Son — the Son God loved – Jesus Christ.”

Thankfully, God isn’t calling us to sacrifice our children or family members, no matter how difficult they may be.

He is however calling us to make a different sacrifice.

God wants us to sacrifice our selfish pride, our ego, our judgemental attitudes, our hate, our anger, our fear, and so many other issues we have that affect our relationship with God and with our neighbour. It is only when we are able to let go of these issues that we are able to see Jesus in every person around us.

How do we do this?

We repent, we ask God for forgiveness, and we allow Jesus to take these parts of our lives with him to the cross for ever.

By doing this we are given life – true life.

This is how we are able to live the words that we prayed earlier – “open our hearts to hear your word that we may seek Christ’s presence in everyone we meet...”

This is how we are able to love God with every part of our being – and it is the only way that we can love our neighbour as ourselves.

Amen.