

Sermon Series – Genesis 22:1-14

Preached on the Fifth Sunday in Lent (Judica), March 25th, 2012

The Rev. Dennis Whalen
Lighthouse Lutheran Church
Freedom, PA 15042

Fifth Sunday in Lent (Oculi)

Old Testament Reading: Genesis 22:1-14

Psalm: Psalm 43

Epistle Reading: Hebrews 9:11-15

Gospel Reading: John 8:42-59

True faith leads to obedience, while only true blood removes sins.

Teaching is a difficult job. If you would ask any teacher, you would understand how difficult teaching can be. Do you remember what you were like when you were in high school? I am certain that you were not the most cooperative student in the class, but teachers desire you to not only listen, but understand what they are teaching. In addition, a good teacher does not only tell you something they want you to understand – a good also teacher shows you. A good teacher explains and then demonstrates so that the student can observe the information being taught. There is a wise proverb, “Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day. Teach him to fish and you feed him for a lifetime.”¹ This is a very truthful proverb. You can give someone who is hungry a meal and their stomach will be satisfied for a short while. However, if you take the time to teach and show them how provide for themselves, then they will receive food on a regular, daily basis. This is much more rewarding for that person. Albert Einstein is quoted as saying, “Example is not one way to teach, it is the only way.” In order to learn properly, our minds desire not only be told a truth, but also to see or read about an example of that truth demonstrated.

¹ Ancient Chinese Proverb

Today's Old Testament reading provides to us a vivid example. If you are not completely aware of the context and the background of the truth being conveyed, the story may seem strange or even archaic and primitive. First, you must understand that this is God's inerrant word. There is some truth He is teaching His children in this text. Second, you must comprehend the entire story of salvation, Genesis to Revelation, in order to get the big picture. This text today provides us with not only a truth, but also a particular example of God's truth. The story of Abraham being tested by God teaches us that true faith yields to obedience, while only true blood removes sins.

In our text today, God tests Abraham and commands him to sacrifice his son, his only son, whom he loved.² Abraham has been through a lot in his long life. He grew up in Ur of the Chaldeans. Ur was a pleasant place to grow up and Abraham would have had everything he could have wanted. At the age of seventy-five, God told Abraham to leave his country, leave his possession, and go to a place where God will direct him to go.³ This must have been a difficult decision on Abraham's part. He walked away from everything he had that made his life simple and pleasant. Yet, Abraham trusted God and left his home land to become a wanderer. Later on in life, Abraham and his wife Sarah⁴ were told by God that through Abraham's child nations will be blessed.⁵ Surely Abraham must have wondered how this could ever occur. He was old and Sarah was well beyond child bearing years. Finally, taking matters into their own hands, Sarah sent

² Genesis 22:2

³ Genesis 12:1

⁴ At this point in time, Abraham's name was Abram and Sarah's name was Sarai. However, for sake of simplicity, I will use the names of Abraham and Sarah when referring to them.

⁵ Genesis 15:1-4

Hagar, a servant, to sleep with Abraham and Hagar bore a child, Ishmael.⁶ However, this is not the way in which God works. God promised Abraham that he would have a child and that child would come through Sarah, not Hagar. Relations between Sarah and Hagar grew tense and soon, Ishmael and Hagar were abandoned and run out of town by Sarah.⁷ Surely Abraham must have been devastated. Was not this the child he had been waiting for? Was not this the child that God promised through whom nations would be blessed? Abraham soon realized that God had a different plan. As Abraham reached the age of one-hundred years old, Isaac is born to Sarah.⁸ This is the promised child they had been waiting for. This is the child through whom nations would be blessed. Finally, after waiting and longing for a child of their very own, God blessed them with Isaac. Many years later, according to some theologians Isaac had probably reached his mid-teens or was in his twenties, the word of the Lord came to Abraham and God told Abraham to offer his son, his only son, whom he loved, as a sacrifice.⁹ Abraham was commanded to kill the child of the promise. There was a story I heard about what the true definition of faith is. A two-story house caught on fire and a young child was trapped inside. As the flames came up through the first floor into the second floor the young boy scrambled to the second floor and finally made it out on to the roof. As the black smoke was billowing up the sides of the house, the boy began to scream. The boy's father was down below and yelled to his son, "Jump, son! Jump!" The boy replied, "I cannot see you." To which the father replied, "Yes, but I *will* catch you! Jump!" That is a true definition of faith – believing in what you cannot see and cannot always

⁶ Genesis 16:1-16

⁷ Genesis 16:6

⁸ Genesis 21:5

⁹ Genesis 22:2

understand. Abraham was commanded to kill the child he had been waiting for literally for one-hundred years. True faith leads to obedience even when we cannot see or understand the ultimate outcome.

Thus, being obedient to the Lord, Abraham traveled to the place where God told him to go and sacrifice his son, his only son, whom he loved. Can you imagine what thoughts are going on through Abraham's mind at this point? The Scriptures tells us before setting out on the journey Abraham called two of his servants, saddled his donkey, and gathered wood for the sacrifice. For three days Abraham and his son journey together. Abraham did not know where he was going for the Lord said that He would chose the place of the sacrifice. Every night, Abraham and his son would lie down together in their tent and sleep at night. Surely Abraham's mind raced with thoughts of whether tomorrow will be the day I will have to kill my son. Every day he would have had that question on his mind. After three days, Abraham obediently seeking the will of the Lord, they reached the area of Mount Moriah. Obedience is difficult when we are asked to do things that do not make rational sense to us. There are things that the Lord tells us to do and we must follow through on His commands regardless of how difficult they are. There is a story of a man who was out in the desert. He got lost and as he was wandering through the desert the pains of dehydration began to set in. His body grew weak. As he began to crawl on his hands and knees, he came across a well in the middle of the desert. This well had a sign hanging on it that read, "This well works, but due to the heat, the gaskets become brittle and hard and, therefore, it needs to be primed in order for the pump to work. Next to the well is a rock. Lift the rock up and you will find a bottle of water. Take a quarter of that bottle and soak the gasket. After

soaking the gasket for fifteen minutes, reassemble the pump. Finally, as you begin to pump feverishly, dump the rest of the bottle slowly on the area near the gasket until the well is primed. PS: You need to use the whole bottle of water. Once the pump is primed you will have as much water as you want to drink. Be sure to fill the bottle back up for the next person.” What would you do? Rationally thinking, you are on the verge of dying from dehydration. Are you going to pour the water in that bottle out? In this case, the answer should be, “Yes”. However, in the back of your mind, you have got to think, “What if the well is dry?” Sometimes God’s commands to us seem irrational. Certainly, in this case I would think that Abraham, still following through on his command, must be wondering whether or not he should really kill his son, his only son, whom he loves? The book of Hebrews provides us with information as to why Abraham intended on going through with God’s command. In the eleventh chapter of Hebrews the author writes, “By faith Abraham, when God tested him, offered Isaac as a sacrifice. He who had received the promises was about to sacrifice his one and only son, even though God had said to him, ‘It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned.’ Abraham reasoned that God could raise the dead, and figuratively speaking, he did receive Isaac back from death.”¹⁰ Why did Abraham intend upon sacrificing the son of the promise? Because Abraham believed that God could raise Isaac from the dead. If Isaac is truly the heir of the promise, the one through whom nations would be blessed, then Abraham believed that God would continue to fulfill His promise. Living up to the commands of God can be difficult for us in the world we live in today. God said to worship Him one day of the week. God commands us to give Him one day of worship and praise out of the week. For some of us, that is a difficult command to fulfill. There are so many things

¹⁰ Hebrews 11:17-19

in our life that come up and interrupt that command, that plea, to be here and worship Him with all our heart, all our soul, and all our mind. The Lord does not care if our day of worship is Sunday, Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, or Saturday. He commands us to give one day for Him; a day of rest which encompasses truly worshipping God almighty.¹¹

As Abraham, his servants, and his son approach Mount Moriah, Abraham tells his servants to wait behind. “Stay here...” he says, “...while I and the boy go over there.” Look closely at the word usage. Abraham tells his servants, “You stay here. *We*, my son and I, will worship and *we*, will come back to you.” Abraham knows that God will keep His promise to him. Abraham knows he is coming back and he knows he will bring Isaac back with him. He knows this in his heart. Abraham and Isaac walk off together to the place where the Lord had shown them, Mount Moriah. As they are walking, Isaac turns to his father and sees the wood for the fire and sees the knife for the sacrifice. “Dad, Where is the lamb for the sacrifice? Where is the sacrificial lamb?” asks Isaac. A lump must have built in Abraham’s throat as he answered, “Do not worry. God will provide the lamb.” Please keep in mind that Isaac is certainly between the ages of five and thirty-two years old.¹² There is little doubt about that fact. However, based upon Isaac’s conversation and interactions with his father and the fact that Isaac is able to take a long journey away from his mother, many theologians believe that Isaac is either a teenager or perhaps in his twenties. Have you given much thought about Isaac’s role?

¹¹ The commandment to worship God on the Sabbath (Saturday) was a ceremonial law that was abrogated with the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Christians now worship on the Lord’s Day (Sunday), yet the command is to give God one day out of seven.

¹² This journey took place long after Isaac was weaned (about five years old), at which time Sarah would have been ninety-five. Sarah, being alive at the time of the journey, died at the age of 127 (Genesis 23:1) therefore would make Isaac between the ages of five and thirty-two.

Abraham is over one-hundred years old and Isaac is between thirteen and thirty. How cooperative do you think the average teenager is going to be about being bound and sacrificed on the altar? Normally, they would not submit and, quite frankly, when primal instincts of life and death set in, there is no way a person of Isaac's age could be bound against his will. Do you think Abraham subdued him or do you think that Isaac cooperated? I believe that Isaac let his father bind him and place him on the altar to be sacrificed. Isaac submitted to his father and to the Lord and believed that if this is the way it has to be then this is the way it has to be. I am not trying to put words into Isaac's mouth, but there is no other way to explain it. Isaac demonstrated complete submission and obedience to his father and to the Lord.

Isaac is bound and laying on the altar and Abraham has picked up that knife to come down into the gut of his son. Abraham is about to plunge the knife as a fatal wound and then burn Isaac on the altar as a burnt-offering unto the Lord. It is interesting that God would have Abraham offer a burnt-offering. Have you considered what a burnt-offering is?¹³ A burnt-offering is where the entire animal was burnt completely. No part of the animal was saved. Everything was burned and it was also a transfer of sin. The offending party knew that a sin was committed and, in turn, blood must be shed to propitiate God's anger because of the sin.¹⁴ When the sacrifice was killed there was much blood shed. The blood ran out of the sacrifice and then every part of the sacrifice was consumed by the fire until the fire went out. The burnt-offering was a transfer of the sin from the one who committed the sin to the one who did not. This sacrifice appeased the Lord. Now, just as Abraham reached out his hand to slay his son, the Angel of the

¹³ Leviticus 1:1-17

¹⁴ Hebrews 9:22

Lord yelled out, "Abraham! Abraham!" and stopped him. The Angel of the Lord stops him and tells Abraham that God now knows that Abraham is God fearing. You must understand that this text is an example of God condescending his words so that we can understand. God already knows how faithful Abraham is. The Lord does not need to test Abraham or Isaac in order to see what is in his heart. Instead, God provides this as an example for Abraham to live by. This is an example for Isaac to live by. This is an example for us, today, to live by. The Angel of the Lord stopped Abraham and told him to take the ram caught in the thickets and burn the ram as a burnt-offering. Abraham must have been joyous over the news that Isaac would not die. Abraham untied Isaac and they went over, grabbed the ram, and offered a sacrifice to God.

There are a couple of things we must note about the angel that stopped Abraham. The Angel of the Lord is a very mysterious angel. The Angel of the Lord, throughout the Old Testament, has powers unlike any other angel. For instance, the Angel of the Lord wiped out one hundred and eighty-five thousand men in an instant.¹⁵ Additionally, the Angel of the Lord is often worshipped by those who come in contact with him. Many times throughout the Old Testament the people fell down on their knees and worshipped the Angel of the Lord.¹⁶ You may ask yourself, are not the Jews monotheists? Do they only have one God? Yes, they only worshipped one God. As a matter of fact, in the book of Revelation when John is taken up into heaven and the angel is showing him the vision of heaven, John bows down and the angel tells John to stop for only God is worshipped. Who is this mysterious Angel of the Lord? I will side with many other of the Reformers that the Angel of the Lord is the pre-incarnate Jesus Christ, the

¹⁵ Isaiah 37:36

¹⁶ Exodus 3:5 and Joshua 5:14

second person of the Holy Trinity. The second person of the Trinity told Abraham, “Stop!” I submit to you all that Abraham met a pre-incarnate Jesus Christ on Mount Moriah. In our Gospel reading today, Jesus was saying that He had already met Abraham. The Jews did not believe Jesus. They told Jesus that He was not even fifty years old and Abraham had died long ago. Jesus replied, “Your father Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day, he saw it and was glad.” Abraham knew of the coming Christ and I believe that he met the pre-incarnate Christ on Mount Moriah. When Isaac wondered where the sacrificial lamb was and Abraham replied, “God will provide the lamb.” he was speaking prophetically. Additionally, have you heard more about Mount Moriah? Mount Moriah was the place the Lord chose for Abraham and God provided the lamb. In the Old Testament, Mount Moriah is the place where the Angel of the Lord told David to build the temple, the dwelling place of the Lord.¹⁷ David would build the Lord a fixed dwelling place, but the Angel of the Lord commanded where that temple would be built. In the New Testament, Mount Moriah is Jerusalem. Mount Moriah is where the temple was to be built and where the true sacrifice, once and for all, took place. God provided the sacrificial lamb on Mount Moriah when Jesus Christ was nailed to the cross and His blood was shed for your sins and for mine. Abraham was stopped from sacrificing *his* son, *his* only son, whom *he* loved so that later on, when we hear the same words, “This is *my* son, *my* only son, whom *I* love” we would take note that Christ was sacrificed in our place.¹⁸ He was true sacrifice. Jesus is true example of what faith is all about. He shed the true blood that propitiates God’s wrath so that when you believe in Him, He forgives you all your sins. Jesus was also the true substitute for us.

¹⁷ 2 Chronicles 3:1

¹⁸ Matthew 3:17 and 17:5, Mark 9:7, Luke 9:35, and 2 Peter 1:17

When you read this Old Testament text again, do not think that it is irrational or archaic or primitive. Do not think that God is terrible to ask Abraham to kill his only son. This text is an example for us; an example of faith. However, this text also teaches us that it is only Jesus Christ, only in Him, that we can look to and have faith in so that our sins will truly be offered up to God and be removed from us. True faith leads to obedience, while only true blood removes sins.

SERMON OUTLINE

INTRODUCTION:

Give a man a fish – he eats for a day; Teach a man to fish – he eats for a lifetime – Unknown
Example isn't another way to teach, it is the only way to teach – Albert Einstein

Homiletical Point: True faith leads to obedience, while only true blood removes sins.

1. God tests Abraham by requiring him to sacrifice Isaac, his only Son, whom he loved. (v. 1-2)

Explain: Abraham; Isaac & Ishmael; His only Son-whom he loved; Obedience; Burnt offering (sacrifice)
Abraham: Left at 75; 86 when Ishmael born; 99 covenant; 100 Isaac born; 120-130 Isaac sacrifice
Illustrate: Boy in the fire – JUMP!
Apply: True faith leads to obedience to the will of God.

2. Being obedient to the Lord, Abraham travels to the place he is to slay his son. (v. 3-4)

Explain: Saddled donkey; Gathered wood; Two servants + Isaac; Three day journey to Moriah
Illustrate: Water well in the desert – faith brings obedience
Apply: You must obey the Lord over your own rational mind.

3. After arriving on the mount, Abraham prepares to fulfill the Lord's command. (v. 5-10)

Explain: Servants stayed (We will return); Wood, fire, knife; Where is the lamb? Built altar; Bound Isaac;
Illustrate: (* explain Isaac's part in the sacrifice via binding a teenager or twenty-something *)
Apply: You must trust in the Lord with all your heart, soul, mind and strength

^{NIV} **Hebrews 11:17** By faith Abraham, when God tested him, offered Isaac as a sacrifice. He who had received the promises was about to sacrifice his one and only son, ¹⁸ even though God had said to him, "It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned." ¹⁹ Abraham reasoned that God could raise the dead, and figuratively speaking, he did receive Isaac back from death.

4. However, The Angel of the Lord stops Abraham from completing his assigned task. (v. 11-13)

Explain: Angel of the Lord; You have not withheld; Ram in the thicket; Substitutionary death
Isaac was raised from the dead - figuratively
Illustrate: (* Supreme example of faith; Supreme example of substitution *)
Apply: Only Christ has the ability to save you from death and bring you life.

^{NIV} **Hebrews 9:22** In fact, the law requires that nearly everything be cleansed with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.

5. As such, Abraham, believing in God, names the place "The LORD will provide". (v. 14)

Explain: "The LORD will provide"; Moriah is Jerusalem;
Moriah: The manifestation of Jehovah; Jehovah appeared;
1) Sacrifice of Isaac, 2) Showed David when temple built, 3) Jesus Christ
Illustrate:
Apply: Your faith must look to Jesus Christ who died as your substitute

^{NIV} **2 Chronicles 3:1** Then Solomon began to build the temple of the LORD in Jerusalem on Mount Moriah, where the LORD had appeared to his father David. It was on the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite, the place provided by David.

CONCLUSION: True faith leads to obedience, while only true blood removes sins.