

LIGHTHOUSE LUTHERAN CHURCH: (Conway, PA)

March 17, 2013: Fifth Sunday in Lent (Judica).

SERMON: 9:00 a.m. (Pastor Rose Ekirunga).

Genesis 22:1-14, Psalm 43, Hebrews 9:11-15, John 8:42-59.

Costs and Benefits of following the Almighty God

This morning's reading from Genesis is the climax of a believer's walk with God.

It is a special picture of what we can expect in our Christian walk.

God sometimes tests our commitment to Him by asking us to give Him what we love most! For Abraham, it was an outrageous demand of his precious son Isaac:

“...‘Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love...and offer him there as a burnt offering...’” (Genesis 22:2). This was quite a command! Why did God command this? Verse 1 has the answer: to “test” Abraham's unconditional faith in God. Would you have passed the test?

14 years ago my faith in God was tested and I failed in some areas. Since childhood my major object of affection has been my education. Education is very expensive in my home country, Uganda. Being a first born of peasant farmers, I struggled financially through many years of school. Also girl-child education has several obstacles in my culture. I therefore treasure my education. My test came

immediately after the successful completion of my middle school. I so much looked forward to joining High school in 1999 but I could not due to lack of money for tuition and scholastic materials. I was out of school for two trying years (1999-2000). My faith was seriously tested during this period (Ref. my life story).

The God of the Bible tests us in order to do us good and not to harm us. Abraham's willingness to obey God was costly but more beneficial in the long run: He received back his son Isaac and had a deeper experience of God's goodness and love (Genesis 22:11-14). The 2 years of my testing have remained the most important years in my life. They were fundamental years of great spiritual formation for me. I would be a totally different person if I had not had that "break" in my life. Today I still treasure my education but it is no longer an idol in my life as it used to be. Have you had some "formational breaks" in your life? Glory to God for the victory; please use the resultant lessons for His glory. I am always praying to God to make for me ways through which my life and education can be used to advance His plan of blessing the world. I strongly believe that God wants us for Himself so that He can bless and work His purposes out through us.

What is the object of your affection? Is it that romantic relationship? Prestigious job? Possessions? Or those great dreams for your life? Are you willing to give to God any of these idols so that He can transform them for better use; for your

wellbeing and to His glory? Our willingness to surrender what we are holding depends on our level of trust in God.

It is a great thing to hope and trust in the LORD (God) as the psalmist notes in today's psalm (Psalm 43:5). Abraham passed the Genesis 22 test because of his unshakable hope and trust in God. In the precious and sacred writings of Martin Luther, volume 2 it is noted that "Christ offered himself in the heart before God." What a level of trust! This is in line with today's epistle (Hebrews 9:11-15): Crucifixion? What a cost! But the fruit and blessing of Christ's sacrifice are beyond description-the forgiveness of our sins and our justification! We cannot thank Him enough. Glory to our Lord and Savior.

For us to afford the cost and thereafter enjoy the benefits of following the Almighty God we need to have ears that can hear and minds that can understand clearly what He is saying to us. In today's Gospel Jesus Christ asks: "Why do you not understand what I say?" (John 8:43). It sounds as if the Jewish leaders had ear plugs in and the resultant noise could not let them listen to Jesus' voice! Are our lives sometimes like theirs? The devil has many ways of preventing us from hearing the Truth, especially in trying times. Sin and our own desires can easily plug our ears, and the sounds of this world can easily distract us and we end up failing our tests.

I almost failed my 1999 test when I thought about committing suicide because of my diminishing hope for a future. On the verge of taking my life, I heard the Divine voice asking me whether I was going to be pastor of the dead! That is when I came back to my senses. I repented, survived suicide, and God has since then consistently provided for my education. He has also made me a pastor of His living sons and daughters like you! By His grace I passed the test and I have lived to enjoy the benefits. I will forever be grateful to Him. I cannot say that I have made it; I am pressing on toward the goal (Philippians 3:13-14).

As long as life abounds the journey of faith continues for all of us. Let us hold true to what we have attained. The ongoing special Christian season of lent is good time for us to set aside time for cultivation of Christ like spiritual disciplines, that will enable us to bear the cost of discipleship, pass the various tests of our faith and enjoy the benefits of being Christians here and hereafter, through Jesus Christ our Savior. Amen.

Ref: Martin Luther

E-text scanned and edited by Richard Bucher. "Sermon for the 5th Sunday in Lent; Hebrews 9:11-15". Taken from volume vii: 163-168 of: *The Sermons of Martin Luther*. Published by Baker Book House (Grand Rapids, MI). It was originally published in 1909 in English by Lutherans in All Lands Press (Minneapolis, MN), as: *The Precious and Sacred Writings of Martin Luther*, volume 2.