

Second Sunday in Lent, February 25, 2018, Year B

St. Andrew's Anglican Church – Douglas, GA

The Rev. Fr. John E. Commins+ - Rector

Scripture: Genesis 22:1-14

“Your Son, Your Only Son”

In today's Old Testament reading from Genesis, chapter 22, a father and a son are asked to do the unthinkable, with absolute obedience. This father, Abraham, has been tested by God long before this event – and had failed in some of those tests – but God knew Abram's heart. Abram and Sarai - their original names, were given a promise by Almighty God that they would have a son – all the way back in Genesis 15 when God said, *“a son coming from your own body will be your heir.”* He took him outside and said, *“Look up at the heavens and count the stars--if indeed you can count them.”* Then he said to him, *“So shall your offspring be.”* (Genesis 15:4-5) The Lord made it absolutely clear to Abram that his son would be his heir – and no one else. God wanted Abram and Sarai to trust in Him, in His time, and a son would be born. Abram and Sarai must have been scratching their heads – since they were a little old to conceive a child. It was with this promise that God made a Covenant with Abram. But, their impatience would bear fruit – a child named Ishmael – born of Sarai's maidservant Hagar –because she wanted to “help God along” with His plan. Instead of letting God be God – Abram and Sarai – through Hagar – brought Ishmael into this world. It was through impatience and disobedience that Ishmael was born – and through impatience and disobedience – Ishmael would NOT be Abram's heir.

In Genesis 17 God made His covenant with Abram more defined and changed his name to Abraham which means *“the father of many nations.”* God promised to make him *“very fruitful”* telling him *“I will make nations of you, and kings shall come from you.”* God then said to Abraham, *“As for Sarai your wife, you are no longer to call her Sarai; her name will be Sarah. I will bless her and will surely give you a son by her. I will bless her so that she will be the mother of nations; kings of peoples will come from her.”* (Genesis 17:15-16) Abraham reacted with disbelief – that an old man and an old woman could possibly have a son – and he asked God what about Ishmael? God answered Abraham's questions and said, *“(Genesis 17:19-21) Then God said, “ your wife Sarah will bear you a son, and you will call him Isaac. I will establish my covenant with him as an everlasting covenant (there is no expiration date) for his descendants after him. And as for Ishmael, I have heard you: I will surely bless him; I will make him fruitful and will greatly increase his numbers. He will be the father of twelve rulers, and I will make him into a great nation. But my covenant I will establish with Isaac, whom Sarah will bear to you by this time next year.”* Sarah – whose name means “the princess” would give birth to a miracle son – named Isaac – which means *“He laughs.”* God's covenant would be with the Isaac's descendants – the Israelites, and not with Ishmael's – the Ishmaelites. Isaac was a child of the promise, while Ishmael was a child of the flesh. Even to this day – all of the stuff that is going on in the Middle East is between the Israelites, the children of Isaac – and the Ishmaelites – the children of Ishmael. It is a family fight going on – over property. Whose property? God's property!

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God's covenant is at the very center of salvation history and is the foundation on which God's faithfulness to His people is established. Without God's faithfulness in keeping His promises – today's message from Genesis 22 – would not have happened.

God came to Abraham as He had done many times before and commanded him to take his only son, "*Isaac, whom you love, and go to the region of Moriah.*" He was told to offer his son as a burnt offering. This was not a request – it was non-negotiable - this was a command - an order! Just imagine what must have been racing through Abraham's mind. He had had many conversations with God – and each time the Lord was right. He was commanded to split the animals for the covenant in Genesis 15. He was promised a son, and so he was blessed with Isaac. Now God is commanding him to take that son and kill him? Can you imagine the thoughts that must have crept into Abraham's mind?

- Didn't God promise that I was going to be the father of many nations?
- Didn't God promise that it was all going to be through Isaac?
- What is God planning here?

Holy Scripture doesn't tell us what Abraham was thinking – but it does tell us of his obedience to God's command and of the journey that they traveled.

Abraham and his family were living at Beersheba, which is over 40 miles to the south of the Moriah region - and so Abraham, his son Isaac, and two servants packed a donkey and set out on this secret journey. The Bible tells us that after three days God showed him the mountain that they were to climb. This mountain must have been significant –the Bible tells us "*On the third day Abraham looked up and saw the place in the distance.*" (Genesis 22:4)

When they arrive at the base of the mountain, Abraham tells the 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's faith that God somehow will keep His original promise are seen in his words – which were not to wait, and I will be back, but distinctly "*and then **we** will come back to you.*" Some say that Abraham was not trying to let on to the servants or to Isaac what was going on, but I believe that Abraham knew the heart of God – and that somehow, someway, God would miraculously save the son of promise. As the writer of Hebrews mentions in chapter 11:19 – that God might even raise Isaac from the dead – and so he went.

As Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering and laid it on his son, Isaac's back, he carried the knife and the fire to make the fire for the offering. All of the parts for a sacrifice were there, except something to sacrifice. Isaac apparently had a clue as to what was happening, and he asked Abraham: "*The fire and wood are here, but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?*" Abraham's faith in his God shines brightly here in his answer to his beloved son. Abraham says: "*God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son.' And the two of them went on together.*" (Genesis 22:8) "*God Himself – will provide the Lamb.*" And God did provide the Lamb – and that Lamb is GOD HIMSELF!

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We can see the vision of a son carrying the wood for his sacrifice up a hill, where he is to be sacrificed. Believers of Jesus see the image of God's own Son, Jesus, who carried the wood on His back, up that same hill, to be the sacrificial lamb. Jesus became an offering for you and me, in our place –and there was no one to replace Him, like the ram in the thicket. He was obedient to His Father's plan that had been set into place since the first sin, let Him go in our place. *"God Himself – will provide the Lamb."*

The mountain that Isaac and Abraham climbed that day – would one day be the focal point of the city of Jerusalem. Abraham saw it on that third day – as others would also, as they would go up to Jerusalem – a place that you could not miss or mistake. This sacrificial site would become the place where sacrifice after sacrifice would be offered – on what would become known as the Temple Mount. The place where God took Abraham and Isaac would be the place that Solomon would build God's Holy Temple. How ironic, thousands of years later - that site is now filled with Ishmaelites – or Muslims – and the inescapable presence of the Dome of the Rock now sits there – only temporarily. In the Book of Revelation, God still has plans for that place!

The obedient father, Abraham, walked with his son to the place that God had showed him – and they built an altar there. He put the wood on the altar, tying Isaac up – and then putting him, as the willing sacrifice, on top of the wood. We can see not only the obedience of the father, but the incredible obedience of the son, who lay there awaiting his fate. I cannot even begin to conceive of the strength that it must have taken for any father to go through with this. There are many fathers, parents, here today who probably couldn't do it, I know I couldn't. Abraham's obedience can give us glimpse of God's ultimate gift to mankind – His Son – nailed on top of the wooden cross. Isaac's obedience points to Our Lord Jesus Christ's silently and obediently enduring His suffering from the Garden of Gethsemane to the very cross itself. It is mind boggling and it is humbling.

Isaac did not have to die, but Jesus did. Jesus Christ willingly carried His cross to the place in Jerusalem called Golgotha – on the side of that mountain in the Moriah Region, and gave us His all, His very life, so that others might live. When Jesus got to the place of sacrifice – where He would be nailed and crucified – there was no replacement waiting for Him. There would be no intervention by the Angel of the Lord telling His captors *"Do not lay a hand on the boy," he said. "Do not do anything to him. Now I know that you fear God, because you have not withheld from me your son, your only son."* (Genesis 22:12) There would be no ram caught in the thicket to take the place of the sacrifice – instead the sacrifice was taking our place - climbing onto the hard wood of the cross and stretching out His arms to embrace the whole world – forgiving those who would accept His sacrifice and His priceless love. Isn't that humbling? It is awe inspiring. He loves me that much? That much? He loves you that much! A message that a man named Billy Graham would preach from pulpit after pulpit. I was blessed to watch him for five consecutive nights in Jacksonville, and the message stayed true every

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single night. The Rev. Dr. Billy Graham would say “God loves you – you!” And then we would sing “Just As I Am” as people would come forward to give their lives to Christ.

God told the world of His faithfulness to what He promises through these words from Isaiah 46:11 *“What I have said, that will I bring about; what I have planned, that will I do.”*

Abraham knew that God was as good as His word – as good as His promises. Several years ago Billy Graham said “One day you will hear that Billy Graham has died – Billy Graham lives – and is better than he has ever been – in the arms of Jesus. That is a promise that God has made to each one of us. “For God so loved the world that He gave His One and only Son – that whoever believes in Him should not perish – but have eternal life.

God keeps His promises. We have living proof in Isaac. What He said – He did. God Himself provided the Lamb – and the Lamb was God Himself!