

Second Sunday In Lent, March 1, 2015, Year B

Saint Andrew's Anglican Church – Douglas, GA

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

Scripture: Genesis 22, Mark 8:31-38

“An Obedient Son”

During the season of Lent we often use the word *sacrifice*. One definition of this word is “*is a loss or something you give up, usually for the sake of a better cause. Parents sacrifice time and sleep to take care of their children, while kids might sacrifice TV time to hang out with mom and dad.*” Very often during Lent we will give up something to spiritually cleanse and prepare ourselves for the coming joyful celebration of Easter Sunday. But before we can have Easter, we have to experience Good Friday!

Let me tell you about a Father who was put in such a position that He had no choice but to offer His Son as a sacrifice. There was no other way but to lead His only Son on a 3 day journey that would take the total and complete obedience of His Son. On this journey, before His Son carried the wood for the sacrifice on His back, He asked His Father for clarification of what they were doing. He obediently accepted His Father's answer and continued to the very place where the sacrifice was to take place. There are some who have looked at this Father and Son with critical eyes of skepticism – but the fact remains that this Father knew what He had to do – and His Son obediently did EVERYTHING that His Father asked.

Many of us can relate to the remarkably faithful account in our first reading today from Genesis 22, and you very well might think that the Father and Son that I am talking about are Abraham and Isaac – but no, I am talking about God the Father and His obedient and loving Son, Jesus Christ. Abraham and Isaac are what we call “Biblical types” who point to the character and work of both God the Father and Jesus. Gladly, Abraham did not quite have to sacrifice Isaac, while Jesus DID actually die, and His death is a perfect and fully effective atoning sacrifice, where Isaac's “almost” sacrifice was a foreshadowing of our Lord's. Today's reading is one of the most awesome examples of God's plan for all of humanity – being laid out right before us. We see a father and a son who are asked to do the unthinkable, and the unimaginable, yet with absolute obedience. The courage and dedication that this obedience requires is, to put it simply, is beyond comprehension. One can only imagine the courage and will that it took to actually walk up that hillside, carrying the cross, after literally being beaten to a pulp, and then to die on the cross, and what about what the Father had to endure, watching as the debt that we ran up was paid off!

In the reading from Genesis, is the long awaited only son that the very elderly Abraham and Sarah received to fulfill the incredible promise that God made to them. The family of Abraham will be made into a great nation and that his descendants would be as numerous as the stars in the sky and as many as the grains of sand on the seashore. **God said that that promise could only be fulfilled through Isaac.** God tells Abraham to take that precious “**only son,**” the son of God's promise, to the mountain in the Moriah region “*that I will show you.*” In verse 2, God tells Abraham to “*sacrifice him there as a burnt offering.*” In verse 7, young Isaac asks his dad a very haunting question. He said “*Father, the fire and wood are here, but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?*” I just love how Abraham answers his son in verse 8: “*God Himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son.*” Indeed He did, the sacrifice would be

God Himself!

What I find to be really encouraging is that throughout all of the Old Testament, God continually reveals Himself through the pages of Scripture, using types, as we have seen with Abraham and Isaac, and prophecies. Several weeks ago I spoke to you about St. Peter's eyewitness account of the Transfiguration – and his words from his second Epistle how these “*were not made up tall tales.*” He went on to say that God made “*more sure*” the works of the Prophets – and then said in fact **the WHOLE BIBLE was true** and that Jesus was evidenced throughout all of it. This is not some great big coincidence or conspiracy, but it is God's plan for mankind's coming to fruition through His obedient Son, Jesus Christ. From Genesis through Malachi – God spread out the “bread crumbs” for us to follow that clearly point to His promised Messiah – His one and only Son – Jesus, and what He would do. Messiah means “anointed one”, in Greek it is “Christos,” in Hebrew it is “ha Massiach.”

The evidence is everywhere in this reading from Genesis! For example: the mountain that Isaac and Abraham climbed that day – would one day become 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 one day become the place where sacrifice after sacrifice would be offered; it was the site where David purchased the Threshing Floor and where Solomon would build the Temple. *"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."* (2Chronicles 3:1 NIV) This site would be the foreshadowing of that one holy sacrifice that took place on Jerusalem's hillside when Jesus took His last breath.

Here was an obedient father, Abraham, who 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 sacrifice, on top of the wood. We see not only the obedience of the father, but the incredible, trusting obedience of the son, who lay there awaiting his fate. Abraham's obedience pointed to God's ultimate gift to mankind – the gift of His Son – nailed on top of the wooden cross. Isaac's obedience points to Our Lord Jesus Christ silently and obediently enduring His suffering from the Garden of Gethsemane right on through to the very cross itself. Do you remember I mentioned the clarifying question that the Son asks the Father – it took place in the Garden of Gethsemane when Jesus asked *"Father, if Thou art willing, remove this cup from Me; yet not My will, but Thine be done."* (Luke 22:42) What a perfect example of obedience!

Isaac did not have to die, but Jesus did! Remember the Apostle Peter's words: *"Like that of a lamb without defect or blemish. He was destined before the foundation of the world, but was revealed at the end of the ages for your sake."* (1 Peter 1:19-20) Jesus was trying to make it clear to His Apostles that His work was not negotiable – (there was no escape clause) that He had to obediently do what the Father asked – in order for the debt to be paid – for righteousness to reign in the place of sin. In today's Holy Gospel Jesus told them: *"that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the*

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scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again.” (Mark 8:31) They would not really understand it until after Jesus suffered, died and rose from the dead. God’s complete and entire plan would all be made clear when the Holy Spirit enlightened the apostles on the Day of Pentecost – 50 days after Jesus rose from dead. It is like with the disciples on the road to Emmaus, walking with the risen Jesus, not realizing it was Him, as He opened their minds to the Scriptures and how they pertained to Him, and they did not recognize Jesus until they sat and He broke the bread. They then realize who was in their presence – the Risen Lord!

We are blessed because we have the whole picture of what took place, recorded in our Holy Bibles. We can read of Jesus Christ willingly and obediently carrying the wood of His cross to the place in Jerusalem called Golgotha – on the side of that mountain in the Moriah Region, and there He gave His all, His very life, taking our place and taking our punishment. I am not sure that we really can comprehend that kind of selfless love. Oh, I know we can say that we can, but the number of times in our lives that we encounter someone sacrificing themselves for others might be pretty small. I can’t help but think of those brave men and women who serve in our armed forces, or the brave men and women who are first responders as police or fire fighters, and emergency medical technicians, who selflessly give of themselves.

Isaac and Abraham were willing - but the angel of the Lord prevented Abraham from doing to his son what God the Father would later allow His obedient Son, Jesus Christ, to do on our behalf. It is very important to recognize that God in addressing Abraham, about the sacrifice of his son, would use the very same words that would be used two thousand years later – during Jesus’ Baptism (Matthew 3:17, Mark 1:11 and Luke 3:22) and again at the Transfiguration (Matthew 17:5, Mark 9:7 and Luke 9:35) – all three times God the Father spoke of a Son who is loved. The timeless truth remains – a father’s love for his only son is beyond description! God’s love for Jesus is more than anything that we can possibly imagine and you know what? His love for us is so much more than we can imagine as well, that He gave us His most precious gift – His Son, in spite of our sins. The Apostle Paul hits the nail right on the head in his letter to the Romans 5:8 when he said *“But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.”* God does not want us all shiny and new – He is not looking for perfection – for only He is perfect. **God loves you just the way you are, but He loves you too much to leave you that way!** The transforming love of Jesus Christ is a gift that we can receive when we call upon Him, when we call Him Lord! When we fall, when we sin, He forgives us – that gift on the cross is not one that He takes back. It is always there and we can ask Him again to forgive us. God is looking for us to turn away from our sin, and because we are human there is that risk that we might fall back into our old ways, but He loves us still – so much – that **God thinks we are to die for!**

Jesus explained that incredible love to the Pharisee Nicodemus, who snuck in at night to speak to Jesus, for fear of getting caught by the other Pharisees. When he asked Jesus questions about being born again, he asked Jesus how one could reenter the womb? So Jesus explains it this way: *“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.”* (John 3:16) You know I don’t think that any of us can really understand the price that Jesus paid and what He endured to pay it. Talk

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about an obedient Son! Jesus told Nicodemus even more as He continued *“For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him. He who believes in Him is not judged; **he who does not believe has been judged already**, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.”* (John 3:17-18) Many people today love to toss around John 3:16 but they will not go near 17 and 18 because they are convicting. You are here on a Sunday morning because you have been convicted, but you have been freed of that conviction – because when you stand in front of God the Father on judgment day – He will not call out all of your sins – but He will see Christ’s righteousness and not your unrighteousness because He paid the price! He gave Himself as a perfect sacrifice for the whole world – not just for Southern Georgia, or for Jacksonville, or Valdosta or Waycross – no instead the whole world! We are talking about God’s love being poured out and the whole world has the opportunity, that invitation to spend eternity with Him is for everyone, but sadly some people turn that down. It is only if you believe in Him! God did His part and now it is up to us to accept Him, to seek Him, to believe in Him and to reflect His love to others. Remember Jesus’ words in today’s Gospel that we heard a few moments ago: *“that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again.”* (Mark 8:31) Sadly – **He is still being rejected by many today** – but He loves them still. All those who turn their back on Christ – He still loves! We know from the parable of the workers in the vineyard - that even if you come in at the last hour and accept the Lord, you get the same reward. Many see Him on their deathbed and accept Him as Lord. That’s the kind of Lord that we serve and who loves us. We can help to spread the Gospel by reflecting Christ’s love to others by what we think do and say in the presence of others – in grateful obedience.