

I.N.I.

Fourth Sunday after Epiphany
Feb. 1, 2015
Genesis 22:1-19

In Christ Jesus, the Lamb that was provided by the Father as the Sacrifice for the sins of the whole world, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

If you have been closely following along with us these past four weeks in our sermons, our sermon text this morning must have caused pain in your hearts. For the past 4 weeks we have been hearing God promise to Abraham and Sarah, a son, the son from whom someday the Messiah would come. A son who had been promised some 25 years before he was born. When Sarah was 90 and Abraham 100 God gave to them the fulfillment of that promise. Isaac: **LAUGHTER!**

The son brought joy and laughter to his parent's heart. Sarah said shortly after Isaac was born: **GOD HAS MADE ME LAUGH, SO THAT ALL WHO HEAR WILL LAUGH WITH ME...WHO WOULD HAVE SAID TO ABRAHAM THAT SARAH WOULD NURSE CHILDREN? FOR I HAVE BORNE HIM A SON IN HIS OLD AGE.** Imagine those early years. The awe and wonder in Sarah's heart as she would hold this baby after so many years of being barren. The thankfulness and praise in Abraham's heart as he watched his little boy, his son, grow up, knowing that he was the ancestor of the promised Savior, the Messiah. And then suddenly in one day, Abraham's life was turned upside down.

God who had tested Abraham's love for Him by having him leave his home country, his immediate family and follow Him to a land he had never been to; who had tested Abraham's faith by having him wait 25 years for the fulfillment of that promise; now lays the ultimate test upon this humble believer. He brings Abraham's training in faith to a **CLIMAX**. This test of Abraham was not for God's benefit, but for Abraham's and we'll see this morning that it is for yours and mine as well.

We have chosen to look at this morning's text from two perspectives. That is why you will find two themes for this one text in your bulletin. The first one speaks of Abraham's test as an outstanding example for us in our faith life and the second applies the sacrifice of Isaac on Mt. Moriah and compares it with the ultimate sacrifice of God's Son, Jesus on Calvary to prepare our hearts as we draw closer to Lent.

Remember all of those promises: the stars in the sky, the sand of the seashore so many shall your offspring be: the promise of being a blessing to all families on the earth because from Abraham's seed would come the Messiah. Now it all seemed so unreal, even so cruel.

There could be no misunderstanding. The same **JEHOVAH** who had appeared to Abraham in visions before and spoke these promises to him, now appears to him again. The directions were simple and clear: **ABRAHAM! TAKE NOW YOUR SON, YOUR ONLY SON ISAAC, WHOM YOU LOVE, AND GO TO THE LAND OF MORIAH, AND OFFER HIM THERE AS A BURNT OFFERING ON ONE OF THE MOUNTAINS OF WHICH I SHALL TELL YOU.** Let those words sink in for awhile. **TAKE NOW YOUR SON, YOUR ONLY SON ISAAC, WHOM YOU LOVE.** God is emphasizing the preciousness of this son, Isaac. He is Abraham's one and only beloved son.

NOW GO AND OFFER HIM AS A BURNT OFFERING! The burnt offering in the Old Testament was a blood sacrifice which symbolized a person's complete dedication to God. God is asking Abraham, "How dedicated are you to Me? Do you love Me more than your son?" In order for Abraham to clearly show that he loved his God more than his precious son it was necessary that all the preparations for this sacrifice be made. It is one thing to say, **I LOVE YOU, LORD!** and another thing to show it!

And that is the first point of our first theme:

**PUT YOUR FAITH IN A LORD WHO PROVIDES
I: WITH COMPLETE OBEDIENCE TO HIS WORD.**

No doubt Abraham spent a sleepless night wrestling with his thoughts, emotions and feelings. This was not like God at all, completely out of character to demand a human sacrifice. The heathen Canaanites, worshipers of the idol Moloch, would sacrifice their children to try to appease him. But

this was the one true God who had promised and fulfilled that promise of this long-awaited child. God's command seemed to be destroying God's promise. God's command not only seemed to violate a father's love for his son but it also appeared to cut off Abraham's hope for ever being saved. If Isaac, the link between Abraham and the promised Savior was killed, how could the fulfillment of the only Savior come to pass? How could Abraham ever hope to live forever with God? God's promise had been clear: **MY COVENANT I WILL ESTABLISH WITH ISAAC.**

Martin Luther accurately described Abraham's predicament in these words: **"To human reason it must have seemed either that God's promise would fail, or else this command must be of the devil and not of God."**

Nothing seemed to make sense. But that's the first point. **FAITH** does not rest upon sense or reason but upon God and His Word, no matter how unreasonable it may appear to us.

What a gut-wrenching, heart breaking anguish Abraham must have felt. And yet what an amazing response: **SO ABRAHAM ROSE EARLY IN THE MORNING.** Not a few days later, or a couple of months later. There was no back talk, no argument, no questions, no running away to try to escape God's will--just **COMPLETE OBEDIENCE TO GOD'S WORD.** Prompt, absolute obedience!

How could this be? Only because the Holy Spirit had worked in Abraham's heart

II: IMPLICIT TRUST IN GOD'S PROMISES.

It took three days to get to the place God had chosen, more than enough time for Satan to work on Abraham's mind and heart, no doubt supplying him with dozens of logical reasons why he shouldn't obey the LORD and follow through on this command. But the LORD had supplied Abraham with one reason why he should and could obey: **AN IMPLICIT TRUST IN HIS PROMISES!** God had never let Abraham down in the past and Abraham trusted that He never would. When they started up the mountain, Abraham said to his servants, **STAY HERE WITH THE DONKEY; THE LAD AND I WILL GO YONDER AND WORSHIP, AND WE WILL COME BACK TO YOU.**

What a confession of faith. First Abraham properly describes what he is about to do as worship. He was declaring by this action, **"Lord, you have my heart. Thy will be done."** Secondly Abraham believed God's promise that through Isaac the Savior of the world would come. He believed that if God commanded him to kill Isaac as a burnt offering, then God would just have to bring Isaac's ashes back to life, and **we will come back to you.** What **CONFIDENT TRUST!**

We know Abraham believed this for we are told this in Hebrews 11:17-19: **BY FAITH ABRAHAM, WHEN HE WAS TESTED, OFFERED UP ISAAC, AND HE WHO HAD RECEIVED THE PROMISES OFFERED UP HIS ONLY BEGOTTEN SON, OF WHOM IT WAS SAID, "IN ISAAC YOUR SEED SHALL BE CALLED," ACCOUNTING THAT GOD WAS ABLE TO RAISE HIM UP, EVEN FROM THE DEAD, FROM WHICH HE ALSO RECEIVED HIM IN A FIGURATIVE SENSE.**

But there was more pain for Abraham to feel. As they silently walked up the mountain, Isaac spoke up. He was carrying the wood, Abraham the knife and the fire (perhaps a torch or a pot with burning coals in it) and Isaac wondered: **MY FATHER! LOOK, THE FIRE AND THE WOOD, BUT WHERE IS THE LAMB FOR A BURNT OFFERING?** That question must have cut Abraham to the heart. Here we see the third point of our theme:

III: ABRAHAM HAD ABSOLUTE ASSURANCE OF GOD'S MERCY.

In love toward his son and in faith to His God, he replied, **MY SON, GOD WILL PROVIDE FOR HIMSELF THE LAMB FOR A BURNT OFFERING.** Abraham relied not only on God's justice, but also on His mercy. If there was a conflict between God's command and His promise, resolving that conflict was God's business, not his. He learned that years ago, as we heard in last Sunday's sermon, when Abraham took matters into his own hands and did as Sarah suggested and took Hagar as wife to produce the promised child. What a mess that made!

Abraham's business was to **RELY, TRUST AND OBEY.** Abraham had to disregard everything his heart, mind and his reason told him, and concentrate totally on God's promises and grace! With simple yet powerful words the Spirit describes what took place. **AND ABRAHAM BUILT AN ALTAR THERE AND PLACED THE WOOD IN ORDER; AND HE BOUND ISAAC HIS SON AND LAID HIM ON THE ALTAR, UPON THE WOOD. AND ABRAHAM STRETCHED OUT HIS HAND AND TOOK THE KNIFE TO SLAY HIS SON.** Only the powerful love of God could have created such a great faith in both Abraham and Isaac.

God knew that in Abraham's heart the necessary sacrifice had been made. Abraham had surrendered his will, his wisdom, his reason, his heart and even his son in obedience to the Word of His Lord. The Lord quickly called out to Abraham to stop and fulfilling Abrahams' words of faith, He provided Abraham and Isaac with a proper sacrifice, a ram whose horns had been caught in a nearby bush.

In our text we also see some striking similarities between Abraham, Isaac and this sacrifice with God the Father's sending of His Son as a Sacrifice for all of mankind.

1) Isaac was the promised son from whom salvation would come--Jesus was **THE PROMISED SON** who brought salvation.

2) Isaac was a miracle born son, born in Abraham's and Sarah's old age, beyond the age of child-bearing --Jesus was miraculously born of the virgin Mary.

3) Isaac was Abraham's only son--Jesus was God the Father's only begotten Son.

4) Isaac was greatly loved by Abraham--Jesus was God the Father's beloved Son.

5) Isaac was to be offered as an innocent victim (in the sense that he had done nothing to deserve being put to death on the altar)--Jesus was sacrificed as **THE INNOCENT VICTIM** for the guilty world: **THE SPOTLESS LAMB, MOST HOLY, THE ONE WHO KNEW NO SIN.**

6) Isaac carried the wood on his back for the altar upon which he was laid--Jesus carried His own cross upon which He was crucified.

7) Isaac was willing to be bound and silently allowed himself to be laid upon the wood of the altar, he did not fight against his father--Jesus went willingly, **LIKE A LAMB BEFORE ITS SHEARERS IS SILENT, SO HE OPENED NOT HIS MOUTH** and was laid upon the cross.

So our second theme is this. When we:

LOOK FROM MORIAH TO CALVARY

I: WE SEE A FATHER'S WILLING SACRIFICE.

God the Father loved us sinful people so much that He willingly surrendered His Son, gave Him up for us all. We mentioned the agony of heart and soul that Abraham must have felt as he prepared to sacrifice his son, Isaac. God the Father felt this and far more, for He **DID** send His son, He **DID** sacrifice His Son, He **DID** pour down on His Son the wrath and condemnation we all deserved. John tells us in his first epistle: **IN THIS THE LOVE OF GOD WAS MANIFESTED TOWARD US, THAT GOD HAS SENT HIS ONLY BEGOTTEN SON INTO THE WORLD, THAT WE MIGHT LIVE THROUGH HIM. IN THIS IS LOVE, NOT THAT WE LOVED GOD, BUT THAT HE LOVED US AND SENT HIS SON TO BE THE PROPITIATION FOR OUR SINS.** What great love the Father has for us as seen in the sacrifice of His Son!

II: WE SEE A SON'S UNQUESTIONING OBEDIENCE.

Even as Isaac obediently let his father tie him up and get him ready to be sacrificed Jesus willingly, obediently set His face toward Jerusalem and the cross. That was the reason for His coming into the world: He was born to die! He was sent to suffer and with perfect obedient love He met death, gave Himself into death as our Substitute. In the garden of Gethsemane we hear Jesus pray to His Father: **NOT MY WILL, BUT YOURS, BE DONE!** To Peter who had tried to defend Jesus when He was being arrested, Jesus said: **PUT YOUR SWORD INTO THE SHEATH. SHALL I NOT DRINK THE CUP WHICH MY FATHER HAS GIVEN ME?** Just before He died Jesus cried out with a loud voice, **FATHER, INTO YOUR HANDS I COMMEND MY SPIRIT.**

III: WE SEE A SUBSTITUTE WHICH WAS OFFERED.

In Isaac's case a ram was offered as his substitute on the altar. God the Father in His Son Jesus has provided a Substitute for us all. Isaac was freed from the bonds of death and here the similarity ends. Isaac, like all of us, has been redeemed, bought back, set free from sin, death and the torments of hell. It is important to note that Isaac is a striking comparison, but not a type of Christ in the absolute sense. For he was freed and another died in his place, the ram. But for Christ there was no other, there was no **JESUS** for **JESUS**, He was the atoning sacrifice, the Lamb, the **SAVIOR** for **ALL!**

He had no one to step in for Him and take His place, no substitute, for He was the Substitute. **HE HIMSELF IS THE PROPITIATION FOR OUR SINS...GOD WAS IN CHRIST RECONCILING THE WORLD UNTO HIMSELF...CHRIST WAS DELIVERED UP FOR OUR OFFENSES AND WAS RAISED AGAIN FOR OUR JUSTIFICATION.**

Abraham called that place, Jehovah Jireh, **THE-LORD-WILL-PROVIDE**. It was God who provided the substitute ram for Abraham's son, and it is God who has provided His own Son as the substitute Lamb for all of mankind. What a wonderful message and lesson for us as we look forward to the Lenten season beginning in a few weeks.

Abraham had to look far into the future to see with eyes of faith that other mountain, Calvary where His Substitute would die for him. But he did see it, for Jesus said, **ABRAHAM REJOICED TO SEE MY DAY, AND HE SAW IT AND WAS GLAD!**

We too, must look beyond Moriah to Calvary to be able to see our Substitute Savior, Jesus Christ. When we do we will be able to put our faith in Jehovah-Jireh **THE LORD WHO PROVIDES, with OBEDIENCE TO HIS WORD, TRUST IN HIS PROMISES AND ASSURANCE OF HIS MERCY!** Because on that mountain the Son of God hung suspended between heaven and earth as the **ONLY** substitute sacrifice provided for you and for me.

Amen.