

Fifth Sunday after Pentecost - A Proper 8 (2026)

Genesis 22:1-14

Psalm 13

Romans 6:12-23

Matthew 10:40-42

“” Abraham, Abraham, said the angel of the Lord....Do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him; for now I know that you fear God...”” In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

The long journey of our spiritual ancestor, Abraham, which began with a call from God to leave everything that provided his security...his country, his kindred, and even his father’s house, and travel to an unknown location way back in chapter 12, now finds Abraham and his promised, now teenaged son Isaac, on Mt. Moriah, a story commonly referred to as the ‘binding of Isaac.’ Many argue that this is one of the most important stories in all of scripture. This week, the Bible study I participate in joined the throngs down through the centuries who tried to find some sort of sensible rationale for God to ask such a thing of Abraham; how the teenage Isaac didn’t put up any resistance; and how much anxiety Abraham must have gone through knowing what he was being asked to do during their long walk to Mt. Moriah. But there is much to glean from this story, and a couple of clues in the text itself will hopefully shed light on its deeper meaning. This is a story of *‘ultimate trust,’* not *‘blind obedience.’*

The opening verse of chapter 22 says that ‘God tested Abraham.’ Here is clue number one. It is terribly important that we know what constitutes ‘a test.’ God’s testing of Abraham summarizes the whole passage and helps us put into context the meaning of all that is taking place. Some of the conversation during Bible

study questioned why God would ‘test’ Abraham, given that Abraham had shown his obedience to God’s ongoing call on his life, particularly his initial response from a heretofore unknown deity to pack up all his belongings and head to an undisclosed location for an undisclosed period. In today’s story, God tests Abraham by asking him to sacrifice Isaac to affirm his genuine commitment and obedience. Considering Abraham’s prior decisions, this ‘testing’ is exceedingly important and warranted.

Remember when the famine struck the land of Canaan, and they had to travel to Egypt for food, and the then-named Abram cooked up the plan for Sarai to tell the Egyptians she was Abram’s sister to save his own skin? They used this scheme a second time with the Philistine King Abimelech. Or what of Abram’s decision to follow the suggestion from Sarai to have sexual relations with her Egyptian slave, Hagar, in the hopes of Abram having an heir? Abram’s decision to accede to his wife’s suggestion came *after* God had promised Abram an heir from his own body, not Eliezer of Damascus. God had made a covenant with Abram, telling him, “Look toward heaven, and number the stars, if you are able to number them...so shall your offspring be.”

Scripture tells us that Abraham believed the LORD, and he counted it to him as righteousness. So, while Abram/Abraham is rightly held in great esteem as a man of amazing faith and steadfast obedience, he nonetheless sought to circumvent the plans of God, not as a willful act of disobedience, but rather as a way of ‘helping’ things along outside any further direction from God. Abraham thus came to be ‘tested’, and the ultimate ‘test’ is unimaginable.

As I mentioned last week, God indeed ‘tests’ his people; he will never ‘tempt’ them. Divine ‘testing’ is a process for seeing how one will respond, either to God and his plan or against it, hoping for a positive response. Tempting, on the other

hand, is to entice someone to perform an evil act. God does not tempt his people to act in evil ways.

The second clue appears when Abraham, Isaac, and the two men who have accompanied them on this journey spot the place where they are to worship the LORD. Abraham tells the young men to wait for them while he and Isaac go to worship, and that *'we' will come back to you*. Abraham is committed to sacrificing Isaac, an act we cannot imagine. However, Abraham continues to follow the LORD's command with the expectation that both shall return. In other words, somehow, someday, even if Isaac is killed by his own hand, Abraham will return to the young men with Isaac in tow. This is the crux of the story: despite all evidence to the contrary, Abraham trusts that the LORD will ensure Isaac's safety because he believes God's prior promise that it will be through his own heir, his son Isaac, that the nations of the world will be blessed.

Abraham obeyed the command of God up to and including the moment when the angel of the LORD called to Abraham two times for him not to lay a hand on Isaac or to do anything to him; *"for now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me."* Clue number three. Abraham had passed the test with flying colors! It was not out of blind obedience that Abraham was doing as he had been instructed; rather, he trusted that God would provide what was needed for the burnt offering and that even if it was Isaac, he trusted God to continue to be faithful to his promise that from his heir would come the blessings to the nations.

Abraham was commanded to do the unimaginable. He was tested to see if he would give up his most prized possession in response to God's command. He could have taken another path, and God, because with God nothing is impossible, could have amended the process to fulfill his plan. But Abraham didn't take another path, and as it states later in chapter 25, "Abraham breathed his last, died

in a good old age, an old man full of years, and was gathered to his people.’ Abraham had passed the test and had become the father of many nations, as God had promised.

We are asked to do the same; to give up everything that is dear to us in response to placing the will of God at the forefront of our lives. It might be unimaginable, especially for those of us who ‘have things.’ It will be an all-encompassing request. It will be costly. Jesus emphasizes this reality of being a disciple of his when, in Matthew, Jesus tells the people that he did not come to bring peace, but a sword. That being a committed disciple of his will cost you everything, possibly your family, your job, your friends, your assets, everything that stands between you and following him totally. Remember the request Jesus made of the rich, young ruler? Being a true disciple will challenge our commitment and our willingness to ‘pay the price.’ Who would be willing to do this if one didn’t trust that following Jesus, living into the ways of God, wasn’t worth it? Abraham learned to trust God implicitly, and while he didn’t live to see the promise come to fruition, he did experience its continuation.

Some good news in today’s story is that Abraham’s outcome can be ours as well. Many of you here today have ‘passed the test.’ You have prioritized your life with God’s will first and foremost. And you’ll know if this isn’t the case; you will feel it in your soul. This anxiety is the call to trust God with everything you hold dear, as it was with Isaac for Abraham. I know what I had to sacrifice in my life to be aligned with God’s purposes, and you know this reality for yourselves as well.

We have decided to fully follow Christ, and it has cost something. That said, our journeys have not yet run their full course, so today we’re asked once again to put down those things we hold most dear and to pick up our cross and follow Jesus. This walk with Jesus might include those things and people we treasure most; it might not. It might well take us to our own version of Mt. Moriah. At the end of

the day, we can lay it down, rest in God's peace, and pick it up again the following day, God willing. In our doing, we will be like Abraham: blessed beyond measure, confident in our trust and hope in God's ongoing provision, and will rest in peace with our ancestors at a good old age and full of years. The cost is worth the price; the test is worth the reward.