

## FIRST SUNDAY IN LENT

Genesis 22:1-18

The Lord Will Provide

The names are important in our text today. The names of the main characters have meaning. Abraham is the father of many. Isaac is laughter, because when God promised Abraham and Sarah would have a son, they laughed. Both names hinge on God's promise.

God came to the father of many, through whose seed blessing would come upon every nation, whose progeny had been promised the Promised Land, and told him to cut out the heart of God's promise, to send God's blessing up in flames, to kill laughter, and laughter would surely die in Abraham's household with the death of his only son.

Can you imagine? You have tried for years to have kids. You've tried everything. Then, when you are clearly past childbearing age, when you fit in much more comfortably Denny's than Chucky Cheese, when you've lived a full century, someone says you will have a child, and not by adoption, but naturally, flesh of your own flesh. Who wouldn't laugh? Abraham and Sarah laughed.

But, just as promised, Abraham and Sarah finally conceived and their decades of sorrow and regret turned to joy and celebration. Now, years later, when we see Isaac, by the grace of God, is a healthy young man who was growing up to be the kind of man Abraham prayed he would be, obedient and godly, even carrying the wood that, unawares to him, was intended to cook his flesh. Everything was falling into place for Abraham. He was finally starting to have that sitcom life we all want, but then God went and messed everything up, telling Abraham to go and sacrifice his pride and joy, his laughter.

Why would God do this to Abraham? It seems so cruel, so unnecessary. Some might say it even seems juvenile, like a teenage girl testing her boyfriend to see how much he will put up with. Why? All those childless years were hard enough on Abraham, but at least he had grown used to the disappointment over time. Why give Abraham a son just to take him away? And even worse, why make Abraham be the one to kill him?

Think of everything that must have gone through Abraham's mind on the three-day journey to the sacrifice. Surely he called to mind all the wonderful memories he shared with his beloved son, all the endearing attributes of his personality. Surely all the great things he was sure Isaac would accomplish—parents have a unique way of imagining their child's future as if it were a grand legend already established from the past—flashed through his head. His every rational and emotional inclination had to tell him to delay, to bargain with God, to disobey. But what did he do? He got up early in the morning, saddled his donkey, packed up and headed for Mount Moriah. With each stage of preparation a part of him must have died. His heart must have been sliced in two as he packed the soon-to-be infamous knife. Yet we hear no hint of hesitation on Abraham's part!

When they got near the place of the sacrifice, the servants had to be left behind. If Abraham took them along, they might try to stop him. Perhaps he knew that too much of him would have wanted them to stop him. God's will had to be done, so father and son had to go it alone. But Abraham says something important as he says goodbye to his servants: "*We'll be back.*" Notice, he doesn't say "I'll be back." He is not the Terminator. He is a Christian, trusting in the resurrection of the dead. "*We'll be back.*"

The same God who told Abraham to kill Isaac was the God who could raise him, as Abraham seems convinced he would, since the covenant had to be kept. The Book of Hebrews says as much: *“By faith Abraham, when God tested him, offered Isaac as a sacrifice. Abraham reasoned that God could raise the dead, and figuratively speaking, he did receive Isaac back from death.”*

How far have we fallen short of this faith of Abraham’s in our lives? What have we withheld from Him who has given us all we have? How quickly have we questioned the Faith when God’s promises seemed to contradict our plans, preferences, or problems? Have we been willing to plunge the knife into the neck of those things we love most? Have we been willing to sacrifice laughter? Have we trusted that the Lord will provide exactly when He seems to be taking away?

Abraham believed God and it was credited to him as righteousness. Abraham deserves our imitation and respect for what he did, but we dare not think that Abraham was somehow a stalwart of confidence in God’s promises throughout his life. No, this is the same Abraham who stumbled in almost every stage of His journey through life and to the Land of Promise, who lied when he feared for his safety, who cheated when he was frustrated with the pace of God’s promise, who laughed when told that God would do the impossible. Like every saint in the faith hall of fame in Hebrews chapter eleven, he rode the roller coaster so familiar to the children of God. But each trial, each test, each failure and each feat of faithfulness was crafted by God into a faith that obeyed even now when God commanded him to do what seemed wrong in every way.

The Lord will provide. That truth split wood, built an altar, bound a son, and took up a knife to kill God’s blessing, to slay God’s promise, in order that God’s blessing and promise might live on. Abraham left all the contradictions to God and reconciled them all in that one short sentence of childlike trust: the Lord will provide. Isaac was as good as dead. Remember how the writer to the Hebrews said Abraham offered his son. Now God says Abraham did not withhold him. God saw as done what had not been finished. Through faith, what Abraham had not done was credited to him as finished. And God provided a substitute, a ram, to take Isaac’s place. And then God repeated the promise of a better Substitute to come who would take the place of every nation.

Abraham told Isaac the Lord would provide a lamb, and that Lamb goes uncomplaining forth before our eyes today. God does what He did not require of Abraham: He gives His only Son, leading Him into battle with the devil, handing Him over to be bound, pierced, and tormented in the flames of His burning wrath against sin. God provides the Lamb, the substitute for all of Abraham’s children through faith, not some ram to serve as a shadow of things to come, but the actual Lamb, the final sacrifice, the One that takes away the sins of the world and thus brings blessing upon every nation. What the Father put Abraham through He now Himself experiences to an even greater degree, for there is no substitute to take God’s Son’s place. God’s Son is the Substitute, carrying the wood of His destruction all the way to the altar of Calvary where no angel lifts a finger to stop His impending death. The Lord provided. And if He provided His only Son, the greatest of all things, how will you not trust Him for what is lesser. The Lord has provided His Lamb. God’s laughable promise has come true. St. Paul says in Romans that Abraham *“is the father of all who believe.”* In other words, Abraham is the father of the Church. And in Christ we, his sons and daughters, like Isaac, have our Substitute, and through that Substitute, we have God’s blessing. The Lord has provided. *“The Lord will provide.”* Amen.