

LENT 5
Genesis 22:1-14

Abraham was probably as happy as he'd ever been, confident, satisfied, proud to look upon his healthy and strong twenty year-old son, for whom He'd waited for so long, born when Abraham was one hundred years old. But God couldn't leave well enough alone, could He? ***"Take your son,"*** God said, ***"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."***

What kind of God was this? Doesn't it seem ridiculous, even perverse? How cruel our Lord's words must have sounded? It even seems like He was rubbing it in: ***"Take your son,"*** He said, ***"your only son."*** Imagine this was the first time you'd heard this account. Who would believe in such a God? Who in the world would obey such a command? Amazingly, Abraham would. What do we read? ***"Abraham rose early in the morning, saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him, and his son Isaac. And he cut the wood for the burnt offering and arose and went to the place of which God had told him."***

And doesn't that put us to shame? Has God ever in your whole lifetime ever asked you to do anything anywhere near what He asked of Abraham? And yet what have we all too often done. We've whined. We've tried to explain away His clear commands. We've made excuses. And we've gone and done, not what He has told us to do, but what we've wanted to do instead. And we've had the gall to call ourselves Christians while doing so, as though impenitent sin could dare to claim a place before the sinless Creator.

The same God speaks to us, but where does it get Him? It must sometimes seem like talking to a wall. Forget binding our son to an altar, we've been unwilling to bend our knee or bow our head in things a thousand times easier to obey and less difficult to process. We at times complain, if not aloud, then in the recesses of our minds, that the commandments are too hard, too unrealistic, too inconvenient, too demanding, too outdated, too inflexible, or too disadvantageous for us. We wonder what we will get out of it when all that should matter is what He has said. Make no mistake about it, faith doesn't bargain with God. His commands aren't up for debate. His will isn't rubber for us to bend. If we can't even offer ourselves as living sacrifices to our God for twenty-four hours in a row, let alone offer our only son upon Mt. Moriah, what is there to be said for us?

Think of how easily Abraham could have dismissed God's command. Think of how easily he could have made excuses that surely couldn't have meant what He actually said. Think about how easily Abraham even could have hated God. And yet there they were, Abraham's only son carrying the wood of his sacrifice up the mountain.

Now parents, hear these next words with the ears of parent. Remember how you've felt when your little one scraped a knee or came home sad after a rough day at school, how your heart went out to them, how deeply you felt their pain. Put yourself in Abraham's sandals and these words in your child's mouth: ***"And Isaac said to his father Abraham, 'My father!' And he said, 'Here am I, my son.' He said, 'Behold, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?'"*** Part of parenting is answering hard questions, but imagine having to answer that one. What do you say? Here is what Abraham said, with no proof to back it up but his Lord's track record and a promise that seemed on the verge of being shattered into pieces: ***"God will provide for himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son."***

God never asks of His saints what He is unwilling to do Himself. Fast forward. God looked down from heaven. There was His only Son, innocent, obedient, beloved. Did His mind harken back to the manger, to that day in the temple as a twelve-year-old, to countless other tender moments? There was His only Son. His hand drew back. Sin must be punished. Oh, that He could have had someone to stop Him. Oh, that there could have been a substitute, a ram in a thicket. But alas, His Son was the Lamb, the Substitute. But what had He done? He'd done all that had been asked of Him. But what law had He broken. He'd kept them all. So why? Because He so good and merciful. What? How in the world could we get that from a Father forsaking His Son? Because we could only be born His children through this sacrifice of His only Child, and because He is unable to break a promise, especially a promise with so much hanging on it.

Yes, Abraham's faith was strong in our lesson, but faith is only as strong as the One in whom it is placed. The true hero of this lesson is not Abraham, but the One in whom He believed, the One who was so good that Abraham could be certain that He would not lead Him into error or sin, the One who stopped Abraham's hand from doing what He Himself on Good Friday did for us to enter a Promised Land greater than Israel.

God's Word is bond. It is covenant. It is more than money in the bank, it is treasure in heaven. Love Him. Serve Him. Trust Him. Not because you are so good, but because He is. Let the cross upon which His Son, His only Son, hung remind you that you will find nothing more certain in this world than His promise and that He will never ask of you more than He can provide or less than what is right and best. Amen.