

Sermon for Sunday July 2 2023

Our readings this morning include a particularly challenging one from Genesis, often referred to as “The Binding of Isaac.” Abraham is told by God to sacrifice his beautiful son Isaac, and even though it grieves him mightily, he prepares to do so, although at the last minute he is stopped by an angel of God. This ancient story is presented as God seeking proof that Abraham will always obey him. And Abraham is shown as someone who really is willing to do whatever God asks him. He knows God wants what is good for him. He knows that God has provided. This is a picture of deep faith, of righteousness, of being God’s true believer.

Thank goodness we are not asked to make the same sacrifice! I doubt that any of us would offer one of our children as a burnt offering if God asked, no matter what the consequences if we disobeyed. We might believe deeply, but that kind of request is beyond our imagining. It is equally beyond imagining that our God would ask that of us.

Perhaps one of the things that we learn from this passage is that the relationship between God the Father and God the Son (Jesus) is in some way defined by the experience of God the Father sending his own only son to earth to teach us how to be in relationship with the divine. God’s understanding that Jesus’ willingness to offer himself unto death for us all has obviated the need for us to offer ones we love as burnt offerings. Jesus was himself the offering so that we didn’t need to do that.

Whew!

And yet there is still something to learn from this cringe-worthy story. It’s about keeping one’s promises, to God, as Abraham did, to each other, as our baptismal covenant reminds us. We did hear those words of promise as we renewed our baptismal covenant at little Bennett Holden’s baptism last week.

In a few minutes, we get to share the experience of renewal of promises as Susan and Peter renew their wedding vows. They will reaffirm those promises.

They chose to do that as they celebrate their thirtieth wedding anniversary, not simply to renew the promises they made to each other but to celebrate how those promises have enriched and guided their lives.

To celebrate those promises.

The very same reason we reaffirm our baptismal covenant at least once a year. The very same reason we affirm our faith – what we believe – when we recite the Nicene Creed every Sunday. To celebrate those promises, not simply to say we're committed to continuing to promise.

Because one of the things that Abraham realized, when God asked him to be a faithful believer, was that there was something good to be found in whatever God asked, even in something that sounded, on the face of it, to be utter madness.

Still Abraham told his son not to worry that they didn't have a lamb handy to make the offering. Abraham said, "God will provide." He was willing to trust in the God who had already provided. He didn't understand, but he was willing to trust. And God did indeed provide, staying Abraham's hand and making sure there was a sheep in a briar bush nearby.

Abraham didn't know what God would provide, but he knew in his heart and soul that God would do something, anything.

Just as when a couple promise to love and care for each other through thick and thin. They may not know exactly what will happen, what turns their lives may take. But they believe in their love.

And so they make promises. Promises have power, when they are made to those whom we love and trust and to those who love and trust us. And the one who loves us most and whom we trust above all smiles upon us, and provides in ways visible and invisible.

So we celebrate with Peter and Susan, as we did with little Bennett and the Holden clan, as we did with the Teschners as they remembered that "even at the grave we sing Alleluia Alleluia Alleluia!" Because God keeps his promises. God provides and stands with us.

Promises made, with God and through God, are worthy of celebration indeed.

And for that, all God's people say "Amen!"