

BIBLE REFLECTIONS FOR THE THIRD SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

Genesis 22:1-14

Some time later God tested Abraham. He said to him, 'Abraham!' 'Here I am,' he replied.

Then God said, 'Take your son, your only son, whom you love – Isaac – and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on a mountain that I will show you.'

Early the next morning Abraham got up and loaded his donkey. He took with him two of his servants and his son Isaac. When he had cut enough wood for the burnt offering, he set out for the place God had told him about. On the third day Abraham looked up and saw the place in the distance. He said to his servants, 'Stay here with the donkey while I and the boy go over there. We will worship and then we will come back to you.'

Abraham took the wood for the burnt offering and placed it on his son Isaac, and he himself carried the fire and the knife. As the two of them went on together, Isaac spoke up and said to his father Abraham, 'Father?'

'Yes, my son?' Abraham replied.

'The fire and wood are here,' Isaac said, 'but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?'

Abraham answered, 'God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son.' And the two of them went on together.

When they reached the place God had told him about, Abraham built an altar there and arranged the wood on it. He bound his son Isaac and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. Then he reached out his hand and took the knife to slay his son. But the angel of the LORD called out to him from heaven, 'Abraham! Abraham!'

'Here I am,' he replied.

'Do not lay a hand on the boy,' he said. 'Do not do anything to him. Now I know that you fear God, because you have not withheld from me your son, your only son.'

Abraham looked up and there in a thicket he saw a ram caught by its horns. He went over and took the ram and sacrificed it as a burnt offering instead of his son. So Abraham called that place The LORD Will Provide. And to this day it is said, 'On the mountain of the LORD it will be provided.'

Matthew 10:40-42

Jesus said: 'Anyone who welcomes you welcomes me, and anyone who welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me. Whoever welcomes a prophet as a prophet will receive a prophet's reward, and whoever welcomes a righteous person as a righteous person will receive a righteous person's reward. And if anyone gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones who is my disciple, truly I tell you, that person will certainly not lose their reward.'

Bible reflection

Do you honestly believe that God will provide whatever you need? Not what you want, but what you need? Our God is Jehovah – Jireh. Our God is the God who provides. And that truth is written across every aspect of Scripture.

One of the most loved passages of Scripture in the Bible is the 23rd Psalm 'The LORD is my shepherd; I shall NOT WANT. He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters. He restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake.' (Psalm 23:1-3). What's that saying? It's saying the Lord PROVIDES.

Later in Psalm 34:10 we're told that "The young lions suffer want and hunger; but those who seek the LORD lack no good thing." Why don't they lack good things? Because the Lord Provides!

And in the Sermon on the mount Jesus declares: "seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you" (Matthew 6:33). It's like a constant drumbeat across Scripture. God cares for you and He desires to PROVIDE for you.

Abraham's willingness to offer up his son was the point at which he truly put his faith into practice. It was when his faith was "completed." It was where his faith was tested. And that's why Genesis 22:1 tells us that "...God tested Abraham..." Test Abraham? Why would God test Abraham?

Well, a ship can't prove that it's sturdily built if it stays in dry dock. It must get its hull wet; and face a storm to demonstrate genuine seaworthiness. It must be tested first to prove it can withstand the storm.

And that's what God was doing here with Abraham. He was testing Abraham's faith. He was putting Abraham's faith into a struggle, into a storm.

And that's what God does with us sometimes. There are times that God will put us in the midst of a struggle or the middle of a storm. And it will be at those times that our faith will be tested and challenged. And at those times our faith will be strengthened.

You see, God has saved us from our sins - but He doesn't want to stop there. He wants to challenge us in our faith and make us GROW UP to be true men and women of God. That's what God does with us. He puts us through a test to help us become more powerful in our faith. It's only in those uncomfortable and trying times of life that our faith is really tested, and we can show by our actions that we are men/women of God. It's at those times that our faith becomes focused and strong, and our witness becomes powerful.

God PROVIDED His only Son so we could be forgiven '...For God so loved the world that He GAVE His only Begotten son...'

The uniqueness of the story here in Genesis 22 is that it shows that God had been planning the giving of his only begotten son centuries before Christ came. Isaac was the mirror image of Jesus. Both were offered as sacrifices by their fathers... and each was described as the only begotten son of that father.

And as the story unfolds, we find that these "only begotten" sons had much in common: Isaac had a 3-day hike to Mount Moriah (Genesis 22:4); Jesus had 3 days from the cross to the grave to the resurrection.

Isaac was accompanied by two servants (Genesis 22:3); Jesus by two thieves (Matthew 27:38).

Isaac carried the wood for his own sacrifice (Genesis 22:6); Jesus carried the wood of his cross (John 19:17).

Isaac willingly laid down on the altar (Genesis 22:9); Jesus willingly was laid on the cross (Luke 22:42).

Abraham thoroughly expected to come back with his only son... even if God had to raise the boy from the dead. That's why he told the servants to wait for them at the base of the mountain and said, "I and the boy will go over there and worship and come again to you." God provided the sacrifice to save Isaac from death (Genesis 22:13); God provided the sacrifice of Jesus to save us from our sins (Hebrews 10:12). Abraham believed his son would be brought back from the dead (Hebrews 11:17-19); while Jesus rose from the dead 3 days after he was crucified (Matthew 28:6,7).

God provides for us. Maybe it is not what we want, but it is always what we need.

But being a Christian, attending a church service, and praying to God, is not like going to a Tesco or Asda store. It's not like you go, get what you came for, and then head home again. The church isn't just about you getting what you need. It's about you participating in what everyone needs. It is a community of individuals and families, all working together so that the church can be all God wants it to be.

Jesus came preaching the Kingdom of God. He talked about what it meant to know God and be a part of a Kingdom that was not a part of this world. He spoke

of a transformation of heart and character that enables us to be a part of what God is doing and wants to do in this world.

We cannot earn our salvation through good works, but good works are the natural fruit of salvation. Good works are the evidence that we have been justified by faith and have a relationship with the God who made the world, loves the world, and wants to save the world. Martin Luther said, “It is not faith **or** works, it is a faith **that** works.” As Jesus said in today’s Gospel reading, there are rewards for participating in the life and work of God here on earth. In fact, he uses the word “reward” three times in those few short verses. The Christian life is not just about going to heaven, it is about being God’s faithful people who work to bring about God’s kingdom on earth here and now.

The benefits and rewards of our new lives in Christ are not just in heaven, but here and now. We lead lives of holiness. We become agents of God to bring about his kingdom here on earth. We are given eternal life that begins now.

The good news is that we do not get what we deserve, rather we are given a gift, and it is life itself. It is a reward, not wages. It is a gift, not something you have earned — nor could you earn it even if you tried.

Too often Christians divide people into good and bad, us and them. Some Christians even see them as the enemy when we should see them as people God loves. We should reach out to them rather than seeing them as bad people to be avoided. We care about them because God cares for them. We realize that God wants to bring all people to himself. Church is not a building. Church is a space in which the Spirit works to form Christlike people, and it is the space in which human beings, formed in Christlike love, cooperate with the Spirit, and one another, to express that love in word and action.

The message of Christianity is not just that we can be saved, but that we can be transformed. We do not have to be a slave to our desires and weaknesses. Through the power of the Holy Spirit we can be made new. We are not just forgiven people; we are transformed people who are being made into the image of Christ. We are not perfect people, but we are growing in our ability to understand the kind of life he wants us to live and the ability to live it. And we can not only be transformed, we can be used by God for his purposes — and that’s exciting.

This is the reward that we have from God. It is peace, even when we face adversity, because it is a life not only connected to God but woven into his life. It is the gift of purpose and meaning in our lives that brings joy. It is the gift of having a relationship with God, our creator, saviour and sustainer.

I pray that we may all grow in our relationship with God, even in these trying times of Covid-19, and remember that God loves us, and he will provide for us. May God bless you and give you peace. Amen.

Frank