

Sermon for The First Sunday in Lent

Date: February 21, 2021

Location: St. John's Lutheran Church, Austin, MN

Old Testament: Genesis 22:1-18

Epistle Reading: James 1:12-18

Gospel Reading: Mark 1:9-15



Sermon Text: Genesis 22:1-18

Sermon Title: Even When Something Is Drastically Wrong,
God Provides

Introit: Psalm 91:9-13; Antiphon: Psalm 91:15-16

Hymns:

LSB 656 – A Mighty Fortress Is Our God

LSB 798 – The God of Abraham Praise

LSB 655 – Lord, Keep Us Steadfast in Your Word

LSB 702 – My Faith Looks Up to Thee

Liturgy:

Divine Service IV, p. 203



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Text: Genesis 22:1–18

After these things God tested Abraham and said to him, “Abraham!” And he said, “Here am I.” He said, “Take your son, 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.” So 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. On the third day Abraham lifted up his eyes and saw the place from afar. Then Abraham said to his young men, “Stay here with the donkey; I and the boy will go over there and worship and come again to you.” And Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering and laid it on Isaac his son. And he took in his hand the fire and the knife. So they went both of them together. 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?” Abraham said, “God will provide for himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son.” So they went both of them together.

When they came to the place of which God had told him, Abraham built the altar there and laid the wood in order and bound Isaac his son and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. Then Abraham reached out his hand and took the knife to slaughter his son. But the angel of the LORD called to him from heaven and said, “Abraham, Abraham!” And he said, “Here am I.” He said, “Do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him, for now I know that you fear God, seeing you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me.” And Abraham lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, behind him was a ram, caught in a thicket by his horns. And Abraham went and took the ram and offered it up as a burnt offering instead of his son. So Abraham called the name of that place, “The LORD will provide”; as it is said to this day, “On the mount of the LORD it shall be provided.”

And the angel of the LORD called to Abraham a second time from heaven and said, “By myself I have sworn, declares the LORD, because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, I will surely bless you, and I will surely multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore. And your offspring shall possess the gate of his enemies, and in your offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed, because you have obeyed my voice.”

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Grace, mercy and peace be your in Jesus' name. Amen.

Abraham lived what had to be three gut-wrenching days. I have to believe he thought to himself, "Something is drastically wrong here." and I would agree with him. Something is drastically wrong here. Even though we know the end of the story, you can't help but read this and say, "Something is drastically wrong, for God to command a father to slaughter his own beloved son." I've heard more than once, about this particular passage, "I cannot believe in a god that would tell a dad to kill his son. I don't care how it ends up."

When we step back from this, and just look at what's happening, something is drastically wrong. You can see how wrong it is because of the love in this father-son relationship. God says, "Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love."¹ Whom you love. Abraham loves Isaac, born to him in his old age. Watching him grow up, Isaac would be the apple of his eye, the light of his life. You can hear that love in the conversation between them. "My father, here's the wood and the fire, but where's the lamb for the sacrifice?" "My son, God will provide."² *My father. My son.* This relationship just speaks of love.

Then to hear God say, "Go sacrifice him." Those words had to strike at Abraham's heart. How could you ask this of father? What are you thinking God?

A father is told to sacrifice his son. Something is drastically wrong here, but not just on a human level. On another level, God's promises are at stake here. He has promised that Abraham will be the father of many nations; that his offspring will be as numerous as the stars in the sky or the sand on the sea shore. God has promised that out of Abraham's line will be born One who will be a blessing to all the nations. To kill Isaac is to break a promise of God.

Something is drastically wrong when God tells a father to slaughter his son. Something is drastically wrong when God's promises come into question.

This is true today as much as it was then. Today, when we see what happens to children, we say, "Something is drastically wrong here." All over America children are murdered. Gunned down on the streets, in a yard, or in a home. It used to be the creed on the street that you did not kill women and children. That has clearly changed. Now the rule is you do to someone else before they do unto you. ... and it doesn't matter who gets in the way. So children die, and we simply say, "Something is drastically wrong."

1 Genesis 22:2

2 Genesis 22:7-8

My wife and I have dedicated our lives to caring about, and for, children. It's part of our DNA. We love them, and when things go wrong it hurts our heart. We care so much, but still, sometimes you lose them. The world comes in and shouts you down. People using them. I had young girl in my class, at my previous congregation. Her dad would punish her by grounding her from church. The world chimes in and a child's soul and life are pulled down. We think, "Something is drastically wrong here."

You can read everyday about the anxiety and worry among teenagers. Kids, the same age as Isaac, are stressed. The burdens and worries in their life have skyrocketed and with that, teenage suicide. Something is drastically wrong. I admit that I read this passage differently than I did even just a few years ago.

Then, beyond that human level, God's promises are involved. Does not God Word promise:

God is always by your side.
You are never alone.
God hears our prayers.
God surrounds us with His grace.
The Lord is good; His love endures forever.
God is never more than a prayer away.
He restores my soul.

Wonderful, incredible promises are written. Then you see what happens to children in our world today. You might begin to wonder about God's promises. Something is drastically wrong here.

Abraham journeyed the three days to the mountain. Those three days must have been gut-wrenching, because he knew what he was going to do when they got there. Still, there are a couple of sentences that show Abraham had hope. He trusted that somehow God would provide. He says to the two servants, "You stay here. I and the boy will go up to the mountain and we will come back to you."³ Not, "I will come back." but "We will come back." He is trusting that God will provide.

Again after Isaac's question, "Father, here's the wood and the fire, but where's the lamb?" Abraham replies, "God will provide."⁴ With those words, we are listening to Abraham holding on in hope of God's sure promise. He has hope. Hope that God will work out the details, and that trust, that hope, that faith Him will stand all the way to the moment when he has the knife in his hand.

3 Genesis 22:5

4 Genesis 22:7-8

Scripture records:

By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises was in the act of offering up his only son, of whom it was said, 'Through Isaac shall your offspring be named.' He considered that God was able even to raise him from the dead, from which, figuratively speaking, he did receive him back.⁵

Did you hear how that description of Abraham started? By faith. By faith, Abraham took Isaac up that mountain. At that moment, Abraham's faith held on to the promise that God would provide.

Just sentences before speaking of "when Abraham was tested" Scripture reminds us:

Faith is the assurance of things hoped for,
the conviction of things not seen.⁶

Abraham held on to that trust, that hope, that faith.

In this situation, God did provide. He did spare Isaac's life, but dig deeper into God's Sacred Holy Word. On a bigger, broader, deeper level, God provided more than just Isaac's life. He provided yours too. We get, here, just a glimpse of it.

- Isaac carries the wood for a sacrifice.
Jesus carries the cross for His sacrifice.
- Isaac is the son, the only son, whom Abraham loved.
Jesus is the Son, the only Son, whom the Father loves.
- A ram is in a thorny thicket to be sacrificed in the place of Isaac.
Jesus, crowned with thorns, on the cross, takes our place.

The promises comes true, not just for Abraham, but for you too. Through Isaac, Abraham's descendants are as numerous as the stars in the sky and the sand on the shore. From Abraham's offspring comes Jesus. Jesus makes you a child of God, His brother or sister, and as such a child of Abraham. God provides: forgiveness, life and salvation. God provides and keeps His promises.

When the world seems to be winning, one Bible passage particularly has been a source of hope for me. Romans 8. I have held on to the promise at the end of the chapter often. It reads:

⁵ Hebrews 11:17-19

⁶ Hebrews 11:1

I'm convinced that nothing will be able to separate us
from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.⁷

Earlier in that same chapter Paul writes:

If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not
spare his own Son but gave Him up for us all, how will
He not also, with Him, graciously give us all things?⁸

Jesus is not only for us on the cross. He has risen from the dead for us as well.

I once saw a picture of the scene of Lazarus' death and Jesus' tears. It caught my attention. It made me consider that Jesus knew Lazarus was dead, even before the messenger told Him. Yet Jesus wept⁹ when He heard the news. Jesus knew He could, and would, raise Lazarus from the dead. Still Jesus wept because His friend was dead. Jesus knew His own death would defeat death for Lazarus and all people, yet still, Jesus wept over Lazarus' death.

Knowing how the story ends does not mean you can't cry at the sad parts. Knowing the end of the story doesn't mean those things don't matter. At those moments, God provides. God keeps His promises. Jesus is with us even when things go drastically wrong.

God provides by keeping His promises written on a cross and an empty tomb. Listen to them:

God is always by your side.
You are never alone.
God hears our prayers.
God surrounds us with His grace.
The Lord is good; His love endures forever.
God is never more than a prayer away.
He restores my soul.

Like Abraham, we are simply called to believe, to trust that God will provide, that He is with us. We are called to place our hope there. You should still expect to cry at times when things seem so drastically wrong, but know this, there will come a day of no more tears.

On that glorious day, a day we call the Last Day, the day of resurrection, Jesus will do for us what we could never do for ourselves. Things will change. Children will no longer have to worry, neither will you. The drastically wrong will be

7 Romans 8:38–39

8 Romans 8:31–32

9 John 11:35

changed and everything will be drastically right. God will wipe every tear from our eyes.¹⁰

Until that day comes trust that God will provide because Jesus is with us, and He keeps His promises.

Amen.

Proclaim God's Word,
Encourage one another in faith,
Witness to God's love and
Serve all people

