

September 19, 2021

The Binding of Isaac

Genesis 21:1-3, 22:1-14

**Young people's message:** This morning's passage brings us to the topic of sacrifice. The passage this morning has to be the most difficult in the Old Testament to listen to. For us today this passage makes no sense at all. Yet it raises so many questions in our minds about sacrifice; its purpose and who needs it the most. Maybe that was all this passage was meant to do.

Let's begin there. Carrying on from last week we said that God was perfect. If that is true then He needs nothing from us. There is nothing we can do to make Him; bigger, stronger, wiser or happier. I think the ones who need the sacrifice the most is us. We make sacrifices the most during Advent and Lent. This is when we sacrifice time and energy to become better people. We try to be nicer to those around us. We try to be more understanding, forgiving, compassionate and merciful. When we make these types of sacrifice we become more God like. We are trying to live up to the image we were created in and for.

We are the ones who benefit from these sacrifices. God is probably happy to see that we are taking initiative and steps to be better people. We gain a greater sense of self-awareness by sacrificing certain things in our lives. Getting rid of the bad unhealthy habits and doing more of the good things.

So to answer the questions; we are the ones who need sacrifice. Its purpose is to make us healthier. Either physically, emotionally, mentally or spiritually. The greatest benefit to these types of sacrifice is that it helps us to draw nearer to God and it helps us to live up to the image we were created in and for. This does make God happy when He sees us trying to better ourselves by doing good for ourselves and others. This is how we build the kingdom here on earth as it is in Heaven.

**Adult's message:** I am going back to a lecture on this passage by an orthodox rabbi to make sense of it from a Hebrew perspective. Trust me it helped very much to understand this difficult passage. I remember a Chinese proverb that said, to drink water nearest to the source of the spring. In other words, go to the source to get an unpolluted understanding of the issue.

Every story in the Torah is a heavenly message. It is not gossip or local news. Every story in the Torah is a divine revelation. God came down to Mt. Sinai and told us that story. Then He had Moses write it down for us. After reading the story, stop and think, where is the Godliness here in this story?

This story this morning is called the Binding of Isaac. Yet it really should be called the testing of Abraham. This story is not really about Isaac as it is more about Abraham. The story is designed to show the greatness of Abraham.

After reading the story you come away with an uneasy feeling about the whole incident. What a horrible position to put Abraham in only to

test him. What an even more terrible position to put poor Isaac in. In the Hebrew tradition it was understood that Isaac was 37 years old and not a child. He certainly knew what was going on at the time. Did Isaac resist, cooperate or fully understand what was taking place? If God is testing Abraham, why involve Isaac? Nobody should be the victim of someone else's test. Why test Abraham in the first place? Surely God must know what Abraham was like. If you read this story and take it at face value, you wonder what is wrong with Abraham, Isaac and God.

To shed some well needed light on this passage, we need to understand the cultural context and practices of the people in this part of the world at this time. Sacrificing your children at this time was very common. The people believed that life here on earth was not that great. If you could get to heaven or the next life, that was better. So the people sacrificed their children. They usually sacrificed the first born and the best and most innocent. This was not a form of euthanasia. So sacrificing your child would send them back to heaven. This was seen as a great blessing. The issue now becomes, how does God impress upon these people that child sacrifice is wrong. God uses the drama of the Binding of Isaac to make that point. The story teaches a moral lesson. Human sacrifice is wrong and God condemns it through this story. This made a great impression on Abraham and Isaac. After this episode human sacrifice stopped among the Jews.

I personally have looked at this story as an expansion of the fourth commandment. That we are to honour our fathers and mothers. However they are to protect, nurture and foster their children. So that they can grow up to be healthy and functioning members of society. Today we just assume that this is what any responsible parent would do.

I have thought in the past week that this story contains a deeper lesson. That as God's children we sometimes need to curb our fanaticism in what we think God wants from us. More often we need to stop and think about what we are doing and the ideas we hold on to. The important concept here is to discern. Take the time and pray about that issue or decision. Let the Holy Spirit lead and guide you. Be prepared to take the time to let the process unfold. Use a lot of common sense and talk to others who have gone through the situation before you. Unfortunately, many times we use God as a scapegoat to justify our bad choices. God does not need our bad choices as much as we think He does.

Hopefully with much discernment and prayer we can avoid those bad decisions. God does not require our death or anyone's. Jesus came so that we could have life and have it to the fullest. Life in abundance was what His ministry was all about. God bless and have a great week,  
Pastor D