

ABRAHAM, A FATHER OF FAITH
Genesis 22.1-18

Well today as you well know we celebrate Father's Day.

About a month ago I carelessly chose Abraham as the father to preach about.

I was thinking about the Sunday School song, "Father Abraham."

You know, "Father Abraham had many sons,
many sons had father Abraham,
I am one of them, and so are you,
so let's all praise the Lord."

He had many sons all right; many, many sons,
and many, many daughters, too.

Just as God promised,
Abraham's descendants numbered more than the stars in the sky
and more than the grains of sand on the seashore.

Abraham was actually God's third attempt,
Adam being the first, and Noah the second,
Abraham was God's third attempt
to birth the "model" family of faith,
to build the "chosen" community,
and to bring about an ethical nation.

Abraham is introduced in Genesis chapter 12,
*"The Lord said to Abram,
Leave your country, your people and your father's household
and go to the land I will show you.
I will make you a great nation,
and you will be a blessing...
So Abram left, as the Lord had told him..."*

Imagine you are seventy-five years old,
living here in Aberdeen, and you hear a voice.
The voice tells you to pack up, take your wife,
take everything you own,
head for the deserts of New Mexico and Arizona,
(hum-some of you already do that)
but when you get there you have to start a new family.

Pretty crazy, hun?

Well Abraham did just what God asked.

In Sunday School you learned that he moved from Haran to Canaan, trusting God.

And if anything that is what Abraham models, teaches,

and passes on to his son, faith in God, trust in God.

I think that is what this passage today is trying to teach us, too,
to trust God with our lives and the lives of our loved ones
in this life and the life to come.

Abraham, this father of faith, demonstrated his faith by doing what God told him to do.
And if we're going to be father's of faith, we need to do what God tells us to do.

OK, God chose Abraham to be the father of a nation,
but think about Abraham's parenting skills;
Abraham as the ideal father? The model father?

I have to ask, "God, what are you thinking?"

First, the Bible tells us that twice Abraham lied and sold out his wife Sarah.
The first words out of his mouth the Bible tells us are
lies or ½ truths about his wife Sarah being his sister.
Then he adds insult to injury as he basically pimps her to protect himself.

Now first and foremost we know
a father needs to provide, protect, and respect his wife-right?

OK, then the Bible tells us that he was "scolded"
by his barren wife Sarah into taking her maid, Hagar,
and having a child with Hagar.

Could he not, should he not have been a bit wiser,
more assertive, and have simply said, "NO!"

That didn't make Sarah happy anyway.
The Bible also tells us that after Ishmael was born to Abraham and Hagar,
at Sarah's "suggestion," but with God's permission,
Abraham sentenced Hagar and "his first born son," Ishmael,
to the sandy Siberian-like wilderness.

Abraham agonized over that decision
and failed to provide or protect Hagar and Ishmael.
He acted much like many uncommitted husbands and fathers today .

In ancient times as well as today,
this lack of responsibility and this kind of behavior creates
broken people with broken promises, broken dreams,
broken relationships, broken and diseased bodies,
and perhaps the most costly consequence of all
broken and confused children unable to trust.

Abraham...the model father? There's more.

In our passage today we read that Abraham is willing to sacrifice his son. At first hearing, we're appalled. That is troublesome to us. We can read headlines and watch news casts every night that are full of stories of parents who hurt and harm their children.

And to make this story about Father Abraham even more difficult for our modern minds to understand we read that, God is the one who asks Abraham to sacrifice his son.

Again I ask, "God what are you thinking?" And God gives us an answer.

Abraham was introduced in Chapter 12. In the next few chapters to Abraham's credit, he bargains with God for the lives of the righteous in Sodom and Gomorrah. and provides excellent hospitality for God's messenger.

And then we read in chapter 22.1 that he is tested,
"Sometime later God tested Abraham."

We get to know something Abraham doesn't, that this is a test. God is testing not tempting Abraham. The difference is that God isn't trying to make him fail or fall. God is giving him the opportunity to strengthen his faith.

It seems Abraham says yes before he even knows what the request is.
"He said to him, "Abraham!" "Here I am," he replied.

The test, verse 2,
Then God said, "Take your son, your only son, Isaac, whom you love, and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains I will tell you about."
(burnt offering implies that
Abraham will offer all, give all, and nothing will be held back)

Does this test even make any sense?
For ancient ears this request wouldn't have sounded so absurd; painful, yes; but absurd, not necessarily so.

God was simply asking Abraham to demonstrate the depth of his devotion to God. God's did that at that time.

You see, other peoples were required to sacrifice their children to show their devotion to their pagan gods, such as Molech.

Today in our culture, we've changed the names to protect the guilty. Many sacrifice young children and the unborn on the altars of our God's called convenience and comfort.

In the video Abraham agonized and asked why he had to sacrifice Isaac.

I think most of us would do the same.

But the scriptures only tell us that, verse 3,

“Early the next morning Abraham got up and saddled his donkey.”

Either Abraham didn’t hesitate to do what God asked him to do
or he was trying to avoid Sarah.

Or maybe some of both.

Anyway, *“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.*

⁴ *On the third day (he’ll have plenty of time to think about it-wouldn’t he?)*

Abraham looked up and saw the place in the distance.

⁵ *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.”*

Did you catch that?

Two things, first, “Look up,” might imply looking up to God, looking to God for help.
Keep on the lookout for “look up” in this passage again.

And then in the midst of this crisis Abraham makes this powerful statement of faith.
He has great confidence in God.

“WE will worship and then WE will COME BACK to you.”

Wait a minute, I thought Abraham was about to sacrifice Isaac?

How can they both come back?

Hebrews 11.17-19 (MSG) tells us why,

*“By faith, Abraham, at the time of testing, offered Isaac back to God.
Acting in faith, he was as ready to return the promised son,
his only son, as he had been to receive him—
and this after he had already been told,
“Your descendants shall come from Isaac.”*

*Abraham reasoned that God could raise the dead,
and figuratively speaking, he did receive Isaac back from the dead.”*

Abraham figured that God could raise the dead.

In a sense, that's what happened when he received Isaac back,
alive from off of the altar.”

Abraham just knew that somehow, someday it will all work out.

Pastor Dave was at meeting at the Riverdale church he was serving in North Dakota.

He got a call saying that his 18 month old son, Tyler was “deathly sick’
and was being taken by ambulance to the Bismarck hospital.

With tears in his eyes he left the meeting,

got in his car, and pulled onto the highway praying,

“Lord, Dorothy and I know that this child is yours and you know it will be very painful for us if he dies. Give us the comfort and strength we need.” Amen.

Pastor Dave and his wife Dorothy knew that whatever happened, somehow, somehow it would be ok. And it was somehow, somehow ok.

Let’s see how the somehow, some way it works out for Abraham.

Verse 6, *“Abraham took the wood for the burnt offering and placed it on his son Isaac, and he himself carried the fire and the knife.”*

Now think about this for a moment.

Isaac carries the wood that he will be sacrificed on about 2000 years before Jesus who carries a cross, a wooden cross that he will be sacrificed on.

You know I’m sure Isaac likes to spend the time with good old dad. But Isaac is no fool and he ‘s beginning to wonder...

*As the two of them went on together,
⁷ 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?"*

Ah, the lamb. This is another clue foreshadowing Jesus...the lamb of God.

Abraham has the right answer, ⁸ *“Abraham answered,
 "God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son.”*

Anyway, *“And the two of them went on together.
 He bound his son Isaac and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood.”*

There it is again, a picture of a sacrifice being bound on wood.

And again about 2000 years later we know Jesus was bound/nailed to the cross.

I have a burning question for Isaac, “Isaac, what are you thinking?”

You father must be 115-120 by now.

You’ve got to be stronger and faster than he is.

Why don’t you just kick and scream, overpower, or even run from him?

But Isaac must be learning what Abraham was teaching.

Abraham, despite his shortcomings, must have been an excellent Father of Faith.

He had taught his son the most important thing of all.

He had taught his son to trust and obey God.

Paul defines the father of faith in I Thessalonians 2.11-12,

*“With each of you we were like a father with his child,
 holding your hand, whispering words of encouragement,
 and showing you step-by-step how to live well before God,
 who calls us into his own kingdom, into this delightful life.”*

Johnny Cash would call this a “good daddy” and wanted to be remembered as a “good daddy.” Most of you know Johnny Cash became a famous singer in the 1950’s. And most of you know that while his career sky-rocketed his personal life bottomed out. His life was nearly destroyed by drugs and alcohol.

In the late 60’s Johnny Cash changed. He gave his life to Christ, gave up drugs, gave a ring to June Carter, and they gave life to a son, John Carter Cash.

Then ohhny very intentionally spent time with his son if they weren’t on the road together or at the lake fishing together, they were in the recording studio writing songs together. He became a “good daddy.”

Let’s finish our story of Abraham and Isaac,

¹⁰ *Then he reached out his hand and took the knife to slay his son.*

¹¹ *But the angel of the LORD called out to him from heaven, "Abraham! Abraham!"*

"Here I am," he replied.

¹² *"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."

God intervened and delivered Isaac from death. Then as Abraham counted on, God provides.

¹³ *Abraham looked up* (again looking for God’s help or God’s provision)

and there in a thicket he saw a ram ^[a] caught by its horns.

He went over and took the ram and sacrificed it as a burnt offering instead of his son.

¹⁴ *So Abraham called that place* (Guess what?) *The LORD Will Provide.*

And to this day it is said, "On the mountain of the LORD it will be provided."

Mount Moriah in Jerusalem marks the spot.

And Abraham was provided for as God had promised.

¹⁵ *The angel of the LORD called to Abraham from heaven a second time ¹⁶ and said,*

"I swear by myself, declares the LORD,

that because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son,

¹⁷ *I will surely bless you and make your descendants*

as numerous as the stars in the sky and as the sand on the seashore.

Your descendants will take possession of the cities of their enemies,

¹⁸ *and through your offspring ^[b] all nations on earth will be blessed,*

because you have obeyed me."

As people of faith, let’s not be afraid to trust our lives and those we love to Gods never failing love whether in this life or the life to come.

And let’s affirm that in song as we sing “Trust and Obey.” Let’s stand and sing.

