

North Kildonan United Church

9th July 2023 ~Gay Todd

“The Faith of Abraham”

Psalms 89: 1-4, 15-18

Genesis 22: 1-14

Matthew 10: 40-42

Sometimes in our Christian lives we are challenged to surrender to God that which we hold most dear, that upon which we set our hopes, even that which God has given to us as a gift. God promised Abraham a son, but the patriarch's wife Sarah was barren. So Abraham chose to have a son by his wife's handmaiden, Hagar. However, miraculously, Abraham later had a son by his wife in their old age. Consequently, Abraham sent away the handmaiden and her son Ishmael. Then God stepped in, and called him to sacrifice his wife's son, Isaac!

What a difficult test for any man to undertake. We can only imagine how Abraham felt. Yet Abraham had learned to obey God's voice. His faith saw beyond the perplexities and difficulties of his present situation. It is part of our Christian obedience to recognise that all our relationships belong to God. This was Abraham's experience. And because he passed this test, and because of God's much greater sacrifice that underlies the truth of this history, we need never again be vexed with the question of human sacrifice.

God called "Abraham!" And he said to him, "Here I am."

God said, "Take now your son."

Abraham asks, "Which son?"

God replies, "Take your only son."

But surely Abraham has two sons? We must remember that Ishmael had been disinherited, and sent away, and Abraham had no way of knowing if Ishmael was still alive. "God said, take your only son Isaac" - the son "whom you love."

Matthew 10:37 says, "He who loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of Me. And he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me".

So even in those natural bonds of life, whoever we love, we must love God more! This was the challenge to Abraham as he went to one of the mountains of Moriah, believing that God was telling him to sacrifice the son of God's promise, upon whom he had set his hopes, and the hopes of mankind. Abraham was obedient. He saddled his donkey, and took two servants and his son towards the place that God had shown him.

We can imagine how heavy his heart was as he chopped some wood for the burnt offering. After three days' journey he left the young men with the donkey - and made a wonderful proclamation of faith: "The lad and I will go yonder to worship, and

we will come back to you" (*Genesis 22:5*). This is an amazing statement, and is perhaps the first indication of Abraham's understanding of the situation.

We read in the New Testament: "By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises offered up his only begotten son... concluding that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead, from which he also received him in a figurative sense" (*cf. Hebrews 11:17-19*).

We must sympathise with young Isaac as the wood for the burnt offering was placed upon his shoulders. Ironically, his father carried the more dangerous elements necessary for the sacrifice: the knife and the fire. Isaac began to ask questions. "My father!" began Isaac. Abraham echoed his response to God. "Here I am," but we can hear the following words almost choking him, "my son." "Where is the lamb for the burnt offering," asked the son. And in another prophetic flash of faith, Abraham replied, "God will provide for Himself the lamb for a burnt offering" (*Genesis 22:8*).

We can see how far Abraham was willing to obey God. He built an altar and bound his son and was ready to strike him with the knife when God intervened. Again Abraham heard his name called from heaven, and again he replied, "Here I am." Then came the words at which Abraham's heart would have jumped for joy: "Do not lay your hand on the lad." Do not harm him.

It remains of course, that "without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sin." Looking around, Abraham saw a ram caught in a thicket. Here was a sacrifice in place of Isaac. Abraham received Isaac back, as if from the dead.

Abraham called the name of that place, "The LORD will see" (or "provide.") Moses uses this title to explain a common expression: "as it said to this day, 'In the mount of the LORD it shall be seen'" (*Genesis 22:14*). God's provision is not seen in terms of our amassing wealth to ourselves, but as an indicator that it is GOD Himself who will provide the ultimate sacrifice.

Abraham responds to God's voice even when it seems in opposition to God's promise. The psalmist is discouraged and impatient waiting for God's inspiration and direction, but still trusts that God will offer guidance. Paul writes to a young church as they struggle with their intentions to live righteously and their temptations to choose sin. The gospel writer encourages a welcoming attitude to all life's encounters, expressed in kind and simple ways. How then shall we live? How do we recognize and discern God's guidance in the midst of daily opportunities and challenges? What does it mean to live "in God's hands" or in the knowledge that "God will provide"?

In the deepest cold of winter, we trust that the greening season will arrive. When we plant seeds, we trust that crops and gardens will begin to grow. In the heat of summer, we trust that cooler days will accompany the harvest. We trust the weather and the seasons to unfold in somewhat predictable ways, though that predictability is being challenged by climate change. How do predictability and trust translate to our

relationship to GOD? When we wait for, or long to experience, God's presence, what sustains us? We believe, but what helps us in our unbelief?

Just as Abraham trusted in God's word, we as Christians, believe in God and trust in His plans for us and his promise of everlasting life. May we continue to be faithful leaders and followers of God's will. Thanks be to God.