

Sermon — 11/01/20

Text – Genesis 22:2

Then God said, “Take now 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.”

Theme – “Isaac – The Only Son”

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

There are some pretty fascinating, magnetic, charismatic, even overpowering figures among the Patriarchs – those special men who come between Adam and Jacob. But the man who is the focus of today’s sermon — Isaac — kind of gets lost in the excitement. For the truth is that he seems a rather bland and boring man, at least when compared with the others. But there is so much we can learn from Isaac and his story. (pause)

Let’s start with a reminder of the last couple of sermons — of who Isaac is, and how he came to be. Isaac is the son – the only son – of Abraham and Sarah. When God first called Abraham, he was already 75 years old. Without any children. An established and wealthy man, with roots in the pagan city of Haran where he worshipped idols. But God came to elderly Abraham and called him to leave -- to sacrifice -- *everything*: family, business, community, his idols. To leave it all behind and follow where God would lead him. But God did not say where that would be. All He told Abraham was that God would bless Abraham and make him a blessing to the world, and that he would have a son.

Now, that son was not promised just so that Abraham and Sarah would have an heir to whom they could pass on their wealth. It was not just so that they would have someone to take care of them as they advanced further in age. It was just not to satisfy their paternal and maternal wishes. No, that promise of a son was tied to the promise of salvation: the Savior would come from Abraham, through

this promised son. And if there was no son, then there would be no Savior. Heaven or hell literally depends upon Abraham and Sarah conceiving that child!

So, you can imagine the depths of Abraham's desire for that promised son. After all, he was not getting any younger – and neither was Sarah. But, for decades, God repeated -- but did not fulfill – the promise. Eventually Abraham and Sarah started to wonder. And finally, Sarah took matters into her own hands: she told Abraham that God must have meant that he would have a son with another woman, a son that Sarah could then adopt as her own. And so, Sarah gave her servant Hagar to Abraham, to conceive a child. She did. And Ishmael was born.

But God was not pleased. He came to Abraham and told him that this was NOT what He had in mind. That Abraham and Sarah would themselves, together, have a son. You remember how Sarah, when she hears it, laughs because it is so impossible: how can she – an old, barren woman – have a son? But she did. Abraham was 100; Sarah about 90. Wow! (pause)

In past sermons, I have spoken of how Adam and Eve were sure that Cain was to be the Savior, and so they pinned all their hopes on him. Even to the point of giving their next son the unflattering name of “Abel” (meaning “Unnecessary” or “Extra”). Well, Abraham and Sarah likewise pinned all *their* hopes onto Isaac (although he seems to be a MUCH more worthy man than Cain). Isaac was their son, their ONLY son. It is through him that the Savior will be born. And so, Isaac was **everything** to them. They loved him more than anything and everything – except God.

But one day God comes to Abraham and says He is going to test Abraham's love for Him. Abraham is to take Isaac -- his only son -- and bring him to Mount Moriah, and there sacrifice him. In this way Abraham will prove his love.

Can you imagine anything more terrifying, more disheartening, more likely to drive Abraham AWAY from God than that? Yet, in a miracle no less amazing than Isaac's conception and birth,

Abraham sets out to do as God demands. He takes Isaac, some wood and fire, a knife, a few servants, and a donkey and off they go to Moriah.

It's on the third day that they arrive, and Abraham tells the servants to stay with the donkey while he and the boy go and worship. Then, he says, WE will return to you. **WE** will return. Note that well. Abraham somehow trusts God – even the One who commanded this most unimaginable, bloody deed: a father sacrificing his son, his only son. And so, off go Abraham and Isaac. And while they go, Isaac asks the obvious question: *“Father, where is the Lamb for the sacrifice?”* After all, he was carrying the wood and his father had the knife and fire. But nowhere was there a lamb or any other animal to lay on the altar. Do you think maybe a question was beginning to form in Isaac's mind? All Abraham would say in response was *“God will provide”*.

When they get to the very spot designated by God, Abraham builds the altar, stone by stone. Then he lays the wood onto it. But there still is no sacrificial animal. And then Abraham – old, ancient Abraham – lays hold of his young son. He binds him with rope and lays him on top of the altar. Surely by now Isaac must have known what was happening. Yet he does not struggle. He does not fight. He meekly allows himself to be put onto that altar, to be the sacrifice. Why would he do that? After all, Isaac was certainly stronger and faster and more agile than his father; he could have run away. But he did not. Instead he gives himself into his father's hands, trusting him completely.

Then, with knife upraised, Abraham makes ready for the final act. To bring it down into the heart of his son, his only son, his only hope for a Savior. Because God had told him so. What hell must Isaac and Abraham have suffered in that moment! Yet they trusted.

But then comes the voice from heaven, saying: *“Do not lay your hand on the lad, or do anything to him; for now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from Me.”* So, Isaac is saved; he is set free of his bonds; his life is spared. And turning around, they spot a

ram in a nearby thicket, caught by its horns. It is sacrificed in Isaac's place – God HAS provided, just as Abraham had said. Isaac and Abraham return to the servants, just as Abraham had promised. His faith vindicated; Isaac alive; and most importantly of all, the promise of the Savior lives. (pause)

This episode on Moriah clearly points straight to Jesus. Just look at the parallels. Isaac is the only true son of Abraham; Jesus is the Only-Begotten Son of His Father. Father Abraham is called to sacrifice his son to prove his love; God the Father sacrifices His Son to prove His love for us. The sacrifice, in both cases, takes place on a hilltop: Mount Moriah and Mount Calvary (which ancient Church tradition saw as being the same place). Isaac arrives at Moriah on a donkey; Jesus comes to Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, riding on a donkey. Isaac carries the wood for the sacrifice; Jesus carries His wooden cross. Isaac asks “where is the lamb for the sacrifice?” while Jesus asks if it is possible for the cup to pass from His lips. Isaac allows his father to bind him, to put him on the altar, he does not struggle or fight even when the knife is raised; Jesus is the Lamb of God (as John the Baptist labeled Him), who is led to slaughter meek and silent. Isaac trusts his father, even when it seems foolish and impossible to do so; Jesus says “*Thy will be done*” and “*into Thy hands I commend My Spirit*” even as He suffers our hell at His Father's command.

It's really all there, isn't it? A rehearsal of Good Friday. A preview of Calvary. A foreshadowing of the Father's sacrifice of the Son, for us and our salvation. And the very one/One who was promised -- the one/One who will give life -- is the one/One who is to die.

Of course, there are also a number of differences. Isaac is not sinless or perfect; he is not the Son of God; he is not able to save anyone from their sins. Isaac does not die but instead is saved at the last second, a ram substituting for him (and that ram, of course, *also* points us to Christ, doesn't it?). What God will do in the New Testament, He promises and foreshadows in the Old. And this episode – and Isaac – are but one more example of that.

And that really is the point: everything, Old and New Testament, revolves around and directs us to Christ. To His sacrifice. To the Father's love. To our forgiveness and reconciliation and reunion with God as OUR Father, in Christ. That is what it is all about. (pause)

And that's true, not just about the Old and New Testaments. It's also true about the Church and our lives as Christians: it is all about Jesus. His life, keeping the commandments and Law for us. His death to pay for our sins. His resurrection to open heaven to us. These are not just "facts" or "doctrines". They are our life. If Jesus did not do them then we are lost. If He had not kept the commandments, if He did not pay for our sin, if He did not rise on Easter then we are without hope. No different than Abraham and Sarah without that promised son. Dead and lifeless.

But God comes to us and He promises us that Son. And He has kept that promise! He has fulfilled His vow. He has proven His love. Even at the cost of sacrificing that Son on the altar of the cross for us. **Your** sins have been carried. **You** have been washed clean in His blood. He gives **you** the credit for Christ's righteous and holy perfection under the Law. Just as Christ was raised from the dead, so will **you** be. The Only-Begotten Son has brought us home, so that we can rightfully and truthfully call God OUR Father again.

And He IS your Father. Even when it might seem otherwise. Even when it looks like He has forgotten you, or failed you, or is against you – as it must have seemed to Abraham (and Isaac) that day at Moriah. Yet they trusted their Father. They had to, for He was all they had. And so, it is with us. All you have is God. But what else could you ask for than that? He is God. All things are possible with Him. And He will provide.

Maybe not what we expect. Sometimes not what we want. But always what we need. He has given us life and all that is necessary to support it. Every bite of food. Every swallow of water. Every stitch of clothing. Everything comes from Him. And He knows what we need. So, have no cares or

worries about what you will eat, or what you will wear, or where you will live, or whether the terrorists or COVID or the government will get you. You are in Your Father's hands. So, rest easy, despite what seems to be threatening you.

You know you can trust Him because He has already given you that Savior. He has already taken your burden, carried your cross, died your death, suffered your hell. He has faced all your greatest enemies – and He has won the victory. And He gives it all to you! You are forgiven. You are righteous and holy. You have eternal life. And no one, and nothing, not even the devil himself, can take that away from you. No one can pluck you from your Father's hand.

And He IS your Father. You know it. He has called you by name in Baptism. He has given you His name. He has called you His child, now and forevermore. Every day He reassures you of that, speaking to you in His Word. Feeding you with the Lord's Supper, the Body and Blood of the Lamb who was slain for your salvation. He will bless you and keep you. That's His promise to you. (pause)

God made a promise to old Abraham and Sarah. And He kept it. They had their son, Isaac, whose name means "Laughter". Yes, he certainly brought laughter and joy into their lives. He was the son given to them. Jesus likewise brings much joy and laughter into *our* lives. He is the Promised Son who has given us life. He is the One who makes us promised sons and daughters of God. And so, we put ourselves into His loving hands, just as did Abraham and Isaac, knowing that God will never disappoint us. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. Amen.

OS — Nicene Creed

FE — Offertory/Prayers