

Sermon on Genesis 22:1-14
First Lutheran Church, Aitkin
Pastor Douglas Larson

September 17, 2017

Dear Friends in Christ, grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus the Christ. Amen

When our kids were younger, as we would be backing away from the theater after watching a movie, my wife and I would begin discussing the movie: symbolism, meaning, messages. Finally one night, they said in exasperation, " Why do you always have to analyze the movie? Can't you just watch it the way it is?"

Well, we both went to Concordia College and had Dr. Walther Prausnitz, head of the English Department for parts of the required English classes. Some of you maybe also have had him. Dr. Prausnitz taught us very clearly to look for the "inner, deeper, hidden, secret" message in writings and poetry. Likewise, movies would also have these parts. It was just something we did.

As we look at this passage from Genesis 22 about the sacrifice of Isaac, we can ask the question of what is the "inner, deeper, hidden, secret" message of this story? For many years I used the CHOSEN book for Bible History in Confirmation classes. Dr. Daniel Simundson wrote the Old Testament portion and he had a very interesting thought, that part of the reason for this story was to show that in Judaism, the people of Israel were not to be involved in child sacrifice. I thought that was a great insight. That may be the reason for this story, but there may be more and we should keep looking for more of the "inner, deeper, hidden, secret" message of this story.

As we look at the story it tells us about how God and Abraham are getting to know and trust one another. A message could be tied to how do Abraham and the Lord live together in a relationship? That can be our question to as we walk with the Lord. This involves the question of "Can I trust you?" That seems to be the question that the Lord has for Abraham and quite possibly the question Abraham has of God.

In my Confirmation years, I remember learning about these three words in relation to the Lord: omnipresent, omnipotent and omniscient. The word omni means all or every. So omnipresent means God is everywhere. Omnipotent means God is all powerful and omniscient means that God is all knowing. These three words have become dogma or accepted thoughts about God.

But as we look at our passage today we run into the question of whether God is really omniscient. God is testing Abraham to see if Abraham loves the Lord more than his son, Isaac. It appears that God doesn't know. God is testing Abraham just as a teacher will test students to see what they know. They hope, but they don't know for sure, so they give a test.

In this story we see that God is testing Abraham and at the same time, Abraham is testing the Lord. Can I trust you? How deep is your devotion?

We want God to be all knowing. We have heard that through the years and we will say it or hear others say things like, God knows what will happen in the future; when I will die; how things will turn out. It gives us a sense of God being in control to believe this. But is it Scriptural?

It doesn't sound like God knows if Abraham will indeed give his only son as a sacrifice. This is an exercise much like dating. Dating is a time when we think someone is a person we would like to be with and maybe even be our lifelong partner. So we spend time together to see if this is so. Dating is a lot like trying on clothes or shoes. We try them on, see how they fit, take them off if they don't feel quite right. We do the same in the dating process—or someone does to us, letting us go if we don't feel right to them. So we have two beings learning about each other in this story, sort of like a date.

Here in our passage today God and Abraham are dating, seeing how the other one is. God's question is: does Abraham love and respect me more than even his only son. Will he give up his son in obedience to me? Abraham appears to love and respect God so much that he would offer his son as a burnt offering to the Lord. Actually, Abraham seems much more assured of God than God of Abraham.

As they are walking up to Mount Moriah, Isaac asks his father, where is the animal for the burnt offering? Abraham responds with "God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son." So they proceed up the mountain, although Abraham must have had a tremendously sad heart. Still, Abraham has a belief that God can be trusted even in this kind of situation.

Abraham is just about to kill his son for the offering when an angel of the Lord tells him not to. "Do not lay your hand on the boy 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." God says Abraham fears Him. To fear God is to love, trust, obey and respect God. This story is obviously about loving, respecting and obeying God more than anything else in our world. We are called to do that as Abraham did.

But along with this message comes another one about our ongoing relationship with the Lord: the future is open---and God in Jesus Christ will go with us into the future. And the future is not necessarily known by God. In this story God did not know if Abraham would obey Him and sacrifice his son, Isaac.

It might feel scary to think that God doesn't know what's going to happen. It might make us feel insecure and we have to deal with that. Abraham dealt with that by telling Isaac, the Lord will provide the lamb for the burnt offering—God will provide for us in the unknown future. God will be with us. It will be all right.

And, it can be exciting! If the future isn't set in stone; if the future isn't just living out a plan that God, even as great as God is, made for us and therefore may take away some of the excitement of living in real time, then maybe life has a "Hang on, we are going for a ride!" feeling to it.

Are you up for an exciting ride with God in Jesus Christ? Are you up to living the future not knowing exactly how or where it will go---but knowing that you are riding with God—and because of that you are willing to go? Abraham was. I think many of you have been doing this because I have heard through the years of the excitement and surprise of the journey you have had with Jesus. It's been good and you have found yourself in situations that you never thought you might have—and you have enjoyed it.

God tested Abraham and Abraham decided to go with God and see where it went. Jesus calls to us, to go with Him and together see what lies in the future, because the Lord will provide for us in that experience. Alleluia!