

Genesis 22:1–18

¹Some time later God tested Abraham. He called to him, “Abraham!” Abraham answered, “I am here.” ² God said, “Now take your son, your only son, whom you love, Isaac, and go to the land of Moriah. Offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains there, the one to which I direct you.” ³ Abraham got up early in the morning, saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him, along with Isaac his son. Abraham split the wood for the burnt offering. Then he set out to go to the place that God had told him about. ⁴ On the third day Abraham looked up and saw the place in the distance. ⁵ Abraham said to his young men, “Stay here with the donkey. The boy and I will go on over there. We will worship, and then we will come back to you.” ⁶ Abraham took the wood for the burnt offering and loaded it on Isaac his son. He took the firepot and the knife in his hand. The two of them went on together. ⁷ Isaac spoke to Abraham his father and said, “My father?” He said, “I am here, my son.” He said, “Here are the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?” ⁸ Abraham said, “God himself will provide the lamb for a burnt offering, my son.” So the two of them went on together. ⁹ They came to the place that God had told him about. Abraham built the altar there. He arranged the wood, tied up Isaac his son, and laid him on the altar on top of the wood. ¹⁰ Abraham stretched out his hand and took the knife to slaughter his son. ¹¹ The Angel of the LORD called to him from heaven, “Abraham, Abraham!” Abraham said, “I am here.” ¹² He said, “Do not lay your hand on the boy. Do not do anything to him. For now I know that you fear God, because you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me.” ¹³ Abraham looked around and saw that behind him there was a ram caught in the thicket by its horns. Abraham went and took the ram and offered it up as a burnt offering instead of his son. ¹⁴ Abraham called the name of that place “The LORD Will Provide.” So it is said to this day, “On the mountain of the LORD it will be provided.”

Sermon for First Sunday of Lent, February 21, 2021, St. Paul’s Marquette, MI

Text: Genesis 22:1-14

Theme: “Trust in God Who Provides”

In the name of Jesus, Dear fellow redeemed,

A man once told how he and his companions were drifting in a life raft on the Pacific Ocean. They prayed and prayed for rain. Finally a rain shower passed nearby and as they kept praying they saw the cloud turn against the wind and overtake them providing the water they needed to stay alive. It was strange yet miraculous when a seagull settled on their raft and provided them with food. Only a miracle of God could explain these things.

When in WWII the first convoys of Allied troops came onto the shores of Northern Africa. Two conflicting storms approached. Either of them could have

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brought disaster. Now who neutralized those storms so that the Mediterranean Sea off the coast of North Africa was smoother than observers had recorded for 68 years? Later when Allied troops advanced toward Europe, it was again reported that the Mediterranean was as smooth as the top of a pool table.

How has the Lord provided for you? Were you stranded on a deserted road after your car broke down and someone just happened to come driving down that lonely road? Was it a situation where you didn't know where your next meal would come from and the Lord provided someone who invited you to a meal or you literally "found" extra money you didn't know you had? Through many of life's trying situations the Lord reminds us of the very things he teaches us today. He wants to teach us what Abraham learned when God tested him severely. Trust in God who provides. 1. Obeying him fully; 2. Trusting in his promises; 3. Assured of his mercy.

We can hardly even imagine putting ourselves in Abraham's place. The Lord whom he trusted had commanded him to sacrifice his only son as a burnt offering. Doesn't that sound unreasonable to our 21st century ears? I can imagine Abraham wondering why God was asking for a human sacrifice now, when he had never even suggested something like it before. But we are never told that Abraham spoke up and objected to the Lord's command. It would have been very easy for him to say, "Lord, you promised me this son for 25 years and now he's nearly a young man and you want to take him away from me?" Instead he got everything ready. "**Abraham got up early in the morning, saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him, along with Isaac his son. Abraham split the wood for the burnt offering. Then he set out to go to the place that God had told him about.**"

What God wanted was Abraham's full dedication. That was evident when the Lord told him to offer Isaac as an offering where the whole animal was burned. The burning of the entire sacrificial victim indicated complete dedication to God. This was the kind of obedience that the Lord wanted from Abraham. God's man Abraham was ready to give his whole heart to the Lord.

As they got closer to the place that God indicated for the sacrifice, Abraham did not even hesitate. He left the servants with the donkeys and he took Isaac with him. When they reached Mt. Moriah, Abraham built the altar and put the wood on it. While we note that he gave his whole heart to the Lord, we should also see that Isaac had a heroic faith as well. He could easily have escaped from his father. Instead he chose to allow his father to tie him up because it was God's will. He knew his father bore no ill will toward him. Isaac knew that Abraham was simply doing what the Lord commanded him to do. So in a true act of sacrifice, the father was ready to kill his son and light the fire. He raised the knife, his heart intent on obeying the Lord. But God stopped him. "**Do not lay your hand on the boy. Do not do anything to him. For**

now I know that you fear God, because you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me.”

One of life's severe temptations, one that can come almost everyday is that we start thinking that we know better than God. What happens when we start thinking like that? In the end we will disobey God. Watch the young child who thinks he knows more than his parents. Dad or mom says, “Don't jump on the bed, you'll get hurt.” But the child does it anyway and he falls and gets hurt. We adults and teens are really no different, though we try to find excuses for our disobedience. God tells us not to gossip about others. In our minds we say, “I'll only do it a little bit. It can't hurt anything can it?” Then we find out later that the gossip we told was true but it really hurt a close friend. God expects you and me to obey him. His commands ARE best.

Winning someone's trust doesn't come easily. And placing our trust in someone else is even more difficult. When we put our trust in God it means we have to allow him to be in charge. Just like Abraham you never need to be worried about letting God be in charge. He proves you can put your trust in his promises.

Ever since God had called Abraham to go to the land of Canaan he had made countless promises to him. Every one of those promises was connected to the Savior. Since Abraham had no children when the Lord told him his descendants would be a great nation, one of the most important promises God gave to him was the promise of a son. Abraham was concerned every promise that God made about the future would come true.

So now, when God told Abraham to sacrifice his only son whom he had grown to love, Abraham believed that God absolutely would keep his promise of a Savior. How God could do that if he sacrificed his son to God, Abraham did not know. Yet he believed the Lord would. He trusted the Lord in just the same way the high-wire walker trusts the wire to hold him so he can walk across. Hebrews 11 tells us: **“By faith Abraham, when God tested him, offered Isaac as a sacrifice. ...Abraham reasoned that God could raise the dead, and figuratively speaking, he did receive Isaac back from death.”** Abraham also displayed his faith openly to his servants and to Isaac. He had told the servants that he and the boy would go and worship and then return to them. And when Isaac had wondered where the lamb was for the burnt offering Abraham had replied that God himself would provide the lamb for the burnt offering.

God asks us to trust him when we don't understand how he can keep his promises. You know that God has said, “You are worth more than many sparrows.” If he gives the sparrows food and a place to perch won't he surely provide for everything that you need? If he helped and protected and guided men like Abraham, David and the apostle Paul, men who were sinners just like you, won't he also see that nothing

separates you from God's love? Why can we be certain of that? Because of the Savior that God promised to you through Abraham. Jesus was the perfect sacrifice, the true human sacrifice for our sins. When God sacrificed HIS SON he expressed his love to you and me in actions that take away the wall of sin that separates us from him.

When God tested Abraham, that believer was most concerned about the promise of the Savior. For it was though Isaac that God had promised the Savior would be born. Abraham believed that promise. So he approached this test with confidence. And he received assurance of God's mercy.

How could Abraham have that assurance? God was even more concerned about the promise of the Savior than Abraham was. The Lord tells us this in the Bible. Now when Abraham told Isaac that God would provide a lamb for the burnt offering Abraham found out how true that statement really was. Abraham found out that what Paul says in 1 Corinthians is really true: **“God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.”**

So when Abraham saw how God had protected his promise by sparing Isaac he knew exactly what to do when the ram appeared in the bushes. He responded to the Lord's goodness by releasing Isaac and sacrificing the ram to show his thanks for God's rich mercy. Now he could see that God would do anything necessary to protect his promise of the Savior. That is how important you are to your Lord. He wants you to know without any doubts that he protected his promise because he was thinking of you. Abraham named the place as a happy reminder of God's sure mercy. He called it, **“The Lord will provide.”**

God lets you know that he gives his mercy to you each time you hear the announcement that your sins are forgiven for Jesus' sake. That same assurance of forgiveness is freely given each time you receive Jesus' body and blood in Holy Communion. Because Jesus obeyed God perfectly when he was willingly crucified, when he allowed himself to be killed, and when he gloriously rose from the dead he gives you assurance that he did everything to win God's mercy for you. He turned away all of God's anger toward you for your sins and instead God is eager to keep all his promises to you. Just as when God spared Isaac's life, he showed Abraham that he would keep his Savior-promises. You and I have those assurances of mercy completed in Jesus.

So when your faith is tested as it surely will be at some time you know that your faith need not waver. Why? Because God does not waver when he makes promises! Remember that God has provided much more than your earthly needs. He gave you a Savior. That was a promise that he directed and made sure throughout history, that this promise would be fulfilled. Put your faith in the only God who provides. His promises are 100% guaranteed. Because of Jesus, you can depend on it. Amen.