

Sermon, July,2, 2023  
Genesis 22:1-14

“Can God be Trusted?”

Throughout the Bible there are stories that many preachers would prefer to avoid, and the story of Abraham and the sacrifice of Isaac is certainly one of those. It raises so many questions. To begin with, what is the purpose of this story? Are we to take it literally, or allegorically? Are there things going on behind the scenes that we are unaware of?

In Judaism there is an ancient tradition called ‘midrash’, which might be helpful. Midrash has to do with asking questions of the text, searching for possible deeper meanings, and, perhaps, asking not what the story meant, but what it means. Put another way, what does it have to say to us in our own time? If we are to think of the Bible as the word of God, then we must see it as a Living Word, suggesting that what it has to say to the ancient world may be different than what it says to us. Might I also put forward the notion that the Bible, in and of itself, is not the word of God, but it becomes God’s word when God chooses to speak through it. Again, suggesting that we have to look at it in terms of our own times, and not that of Abraham’s time.

For example, looking at it in terms of what it meant we find that, among other things, it addresses the issue of child sacrifice, which was a very real issue and concern in much of the ancient world, but really has no bearing on us.

What it does ask of us is to consider the issues of faith, trust, and obedience. Looking at the story itself we see from the first verse that God is putting Abraham to test, that is, a test of Abraham’s trust and willingness to obey God’s command, keeping in mind that not only is God telling him to kill his own son, but that he is also telling him to kill the promise that Abraham would become the father of many nations. The promise depends upon Isaac’s survival and having children of his own.

Notice that it takes three days for them to reach Mt. Moriah , which would have given Abraham plenty of time to think about what he was told to do and appears to show his resolve to see it through. But notice as well that when they reach the destination, he tells the two servants to stay put while he and Isaac go on to the place of sacrifice. On one hand that might suggest that he does not want the servants to witness

what he is about to do. But also note that he says to them “we will come back to you.” Place emphasis on the word ‘we’, which may also suggest that Abraham may have had some hope that God would intervene before he committed the heinous act.

Of course, we do know that God does send an angel to intervene, Isaac is spared, and the promise would be fulfilled.

Obviously, the question this raises for us is, to what degree are we willing to place our trust in God? And are we willing to be obedient to God’s will, particularly as it is revealed to us in the teachings of Jesus? Are we willing to care for the poor and marginalized? Are we willing to turn the other cheek? Are we willing to love not only God, but our neighbor and our enemy as well?

Other questions the story asks of us have to do with faith and trust - and as I have pointed out before, in the original Greek the words faith and trust are pretty much synonymous.

Trust is such an important aspect of human existence and extends beyond our trust in God. Without trust between ourselves, in our relationships of family, friends, and neighbors. Without trust between communities and nations, the world would ultimately fall apart. It can at times be difficult and requires struggle and work.

We can say the same about faith, which can also demand struggle. It’s not about just believing and then all things just fall into place. Faith is often a journey which requires patience and facing obstacles that may appear to be in the way. Consider for example the story of Jacob wrestling with a man and think of it allegorically. Wrestling with the man can also be symbolic of wrestling with an angel, which would suggest wrestling with God, which in turn speaks of wrestling with one’s own faith. The story also tells us that the wrestling match went all night long. Again, God’s timing is not our timing, that the journey of faith can be long and arduous. It also tells us that the wrestling ended at daybreak - pointing to a moment of revelation, perhaps, the answer to prayers. But it also tells us that the man touched Jacob’s hip putting it out of joint. Sometimes the journey of faith does come with injury along the way. Jacob may have walked with a limp for the rest of his life, but the point is that he did continue, just as we can continue on our own journey of faith, regardless of the bumps and bruises we receive along the way, as long as we place our continued trust in God. Amen.

**Let us pray:** Eternal Spirit of the universe, we thank you that you do not leave us alone but place your word within us and in the midst of our life together. You are no statue of silver or gold, but a little reality on the face of the earth. Give us courage and commitment to let your winds blow through us and to let your life be revealed among us. Empowered by your Spirit may we care for the needs of all people, break bread together with joy, and praise you day by day. Grant us faith , and trust, helping us to be obedient to you will, through Jesus who lives among us. Amen.