

ST PAUL'S CHURCH (RONDEBOSCH)

SERMON (YEAR A)

28 JUNE 2020 (LOCKDOWN DAY 94)

READINGS: GENESIS 22:1-14 // PSALM13// ROMANS 6:12-23//

MATTHEW 10:40-42

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Let us pray

Lord of all wisdom you have ordered our life that we walk by faith and not by sight. Grant that in the darkness of this world, we may witness to our faith, by the courage of our lives. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. AMEN

In Genesis 22v 2 we read *“Then God said to Abraham Take your son, your only Son Isaac, who you love and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him as a burnt offering on one of the mountains I will tell you about”*

A story was told of Siamese twins that were joined at the waist. Both could not live, so the parents had to choose which child lived and which child died. What a terrible predicament. What would you do if God have to ask you to sacrifice your son or daughter? Or what is the most important /precious thing in your life today, what would you do if God asked you to sacrifice that important thing— Will you do it? This is the position that God placed Abraham in this passage Abraham had a choice to make and it involved the life of his son?

Unfortunately, this story from Genesis is not easy at all. This story presents a dialogue between Abraham and God and between Abraham and Isaac. It follows closely on last week story of the birth of Isaacs. He was the long awaited child of his parents the miracle boy born to Abraham and Sarah in their old age. And it is this son that God ask Abraham had to offer as a burnt offering.

The purpose of the Burnt Offering in the Old Testament was for general atonement of sin and expression of devotion to God. The instructions for the Burnt Offering are given in Lev 1:3-17. The offering could be a bull, sheep or goat, or dove or pigeon.

Note God did not only say “take Isaac” but he said take your beloved son, who you dearly love, your beloved, the object of your desire, whom you love so

much who is going to be your successor, from whom also I promised to multiply your descendants

It says Abraham rose early the following morning. We can just imagine how Abraham felt. As a loving father he must have been very troubled in his heart and must have shed tears in great anguish. Abraham had probably spent the whole night without any sleep, tossing and turning. Can you feel Abraham's pain, it must be horrific, taking your son and offer him as a burnt offering. The miracle boy this fulfilment of promise now walks towards death. It seemed so improbable and impossible but Abraham obeyed. He did not stop the journey and turn around, he continued his three day journey towards the mountains. Three days to think what he must do. Three days of torture, turmoil and agony.

I want us to recall one of those times when you had to make an important decision (it may not be offering up your son/daughter but it might be something important, life-changing). You could not sleep, tossing and turning worrying. Asking what must I do how is this going to affect my family, my life, my future? I had a lot of these nights but allow me to share an important decision I had to make regarding my calling in 2011: I had to decide if I am going part time (non- stipendiary) or full time (stipendiary) in the ordained ministry. At that time I was the breadwinner. I was the anchor in the family since my mom's death in 2010 and I made decisions and had to see to all expenses. Everything in the family revolved around me. And I was worried how will my family cope financially, -and how will this affect the close family bond that we shared when I have to go to Grahamstown. Furthermore at that time I was deputy principal and could become the principal (because my principal retired at the end of 2012). Can you imagine I have to give all this up? I could not sleep. I wrestled with God and ask him how he can ask me to do something like this. I prayed about it. I fasted. I asked my close friends for advice.

What is your test? What are you grappling with? Why do you have sleepless nights? What is the turmoil that you are going through right now? What important decisions do you have to make?

I wondered what went through Abraham's mind when Isaac asked so lovingly the question. Father where is the lamb for the burnt offering? What could he

say? You are it! I love you son but I am going to sacrifice you. Rather Abraham replied God will provide the lamb for the burnt offering my son.

But what is more amazing is Isaac's obedience. According to the Scripture he did not shrink back or protested he submitted and yielded to what was being done by his father and like a lamb, lay on the altar without resistance, awaiting the father's arm. He even carried the wood for the offering.

And what about God? How can God of wisdom, mercy, justice and love command Abraham to offer up his only son as a sacrifice? How can God be so cruel? How can God ask such a thing?

And maybe many of us are asking how our loving compassionate God of wisdom and mercy can, allow so many people to die from the COVID 19 pandemic? How can he allow that we as family members can't see or say our last goodbyes to our loved ones?

But then the story takes a turn, while pain and heartache, grief and sorrow, dread, death, brokenness went up the one side of the mountain// provision, healing. Glory, salvation, delight, deliverance, blessings was going down the other side,

As Abraham raised the knife to slay his son, the Lord sent an angel to stop him. Abraham's faith has been proven. Imagine how greatly relieve and glad Abraham must have been to receive his son back.

And Abraham looked up and saw a ram, caught in a thicket by its horn and he sacrifice it. When Abraham demonstrated he was willing to go all the way in his obedience to God, the Lord provided a solution to his crisis. God was testing Abraham. He did not want his son he wanted him to surrender, to trust God.

CONCLUSION

Yes my friends if we obey and listen and trust God he will provide and bless us abundantly as he did with Abraham. However you will agree with me there are times that we sacrifice everything but we still experience that heartache and pain, anxiety and turmoil.

Coming back to my own story I resigned in 2012 went to Grahamstown and I have been ordained now for seven years. And yes I don't receive the salary of a "deputy principal" or "principal" but I am happy in my ministry and my family is coping but right now I am experiencing just like you the anxiety , turmoil, worry even sadness of the effects of the COVID 19 pandemic on my ministry as a priest. I can't do the things I love celebrating the Eucharist with you as a Church family, Do my pastoral duties, sitting next to a bed of someone that is dying or his sick ministering to him/her.

However I want to encourage you and myself this morning with v 8 "***God himself will provide the lamb for a burnt offering.***" It's the cry of hope in the midst of despair, the vision of something beyond the present horror. No matter what the test is that you are facing, no matter what turmoil, anxiety and crises you are facing – remember verse 8 and cling to it with all your heart and move on in hope. – "God will provide himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son" and move on in hope up the Mount Moriah of providence, and into the promise of deliverance. AMEN