

God Is Our Provider

Text: Genesis 22:1-14

Romans 6:12-23 (Series A, 4th Sunday after Pentecost) Ps 13

Matthew 10:40-42

Abraham looked around and saw a ram caught in a bush by its horns. He went and got it and offered it as a burnt offering instead of his son. Abraham named the place "The Lord Provides." And even people today say, "On the Lord's mountain he provides." (22:13,14)

Prayer:

Some people have problems with this Abraham and Isaac story. Biblical scholars have debated it and marvelled at it throughout the centuries. The story of Abraham and Isaac that we heard this morning stirs up some very deep feelings in us. It is our feelings that fuel the debate.

We have a sense of horror as Abraham sets on his trek - Isaac beside him, wood on Isaac's back, the pot of hot coals, and a knife in his belt, and the innocent question about the whereabouts of the sacrifice. Then comes our sense of relief when, at the last moment, God speaks and stops Abraham's hand completing what appears to be a senseless slaughter of his innocent son. **The questions rage in our minds.**

- Did God really ask Abraham to sacrifice his son upon an altar?
- How could God ask that? What kind of God would ask that?
- What kind of Father was Abraham?
- What kind of man could kill his own son?
- Should he really be held up as a model of faith for us all?

Let's take a closer look at this story. Abraham really loved his son Isaac! The boy was a true miracle baby. Abraham and Sarah had waited for years for him to be born. Finally, when Abraham was 100 and Sarah was 90, he came along.

Yes, people lived longer in those days than they do today. But they didn't have children at the ages of 100 and 90. Sarah even laughed when God promised to give her a child. She knew she had gone past, child bearing age. *But with God, nothing is impossible. He had promised, and he delivered.*

Isaac was truly a gift of God's grace. Isaac's miraculous conception and birth indicate that he wasn't just an ordinary baby. In many ways he was no different to any other baby born on this world.

But God had connected with him a **promise** that was just out of this world. God had told Abraham that this boy would be the forefather of the promised Saviour. That baby boy, finally in his arms and on his knee, meant that God would keep his promise of making a great nation from his descendants and from whom would come great blessings for all nations.

Can we even begin to imagine how much Abraham must have loved his son? But then came the blow! One night God came to Abraham with an important request.

"Take your son, your only son Isaac whom you love. Go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains I will tell you about."

I can't begin to imagine what emotions must have surged through Abraham's heart. We get some idea of how special Isaac was to Abraham when the writer of this Genesis recalls God's words, *"your son, your only son, Isaac, whom you love."*

When the Bible says that **"God tested Abraham,"** that is indeed an understatement. This was truly a test. I don't know about you, but I don't think I would have reacted as Abraham did. Let's put ourselves in his place. After we had recovered from the shock, what would our reaction have been?

Perhaps our reaction would be "Are you kidding! I've waited 100 years for this boy! There's no way I'm going to do what you want me to do!" But that's not Abraham's response. Incredibly we are told he got up the next morning and saddled his donkey.

He chopped the wood, got the pot of hot coals ready, took two servants and his son, and set out for the place where God had told him to go. He loved his son, but he loved his God, his heavenly Father even more.

After a three-day journey on a dusty trail, and finally they arrived at *Mount Moriah*. At the foot of the mountain, Abraham told his servants, *"Stay here with the donkey. The boy and I will go over there and worship, and then we will come back to you."* In these words of Abraham we can see his faith and trust in God. Did you catch what Abraham said, *"The boy and I will go over there and worship, and then we will come back to you."*

He fully intended to offer Isaac as a sacrifice, but he had that remarkable faith that believed that somehow, they would return together. So Abraham and Isaac proceeded up the mountain. As they walked, Isaac inquired of his father, *"The fire and wood are here,"* Isaac said, *"but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?"* Notice what Abraham says. *"God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son."*

And that's exactly what happened. God did provide. Abraham was about to plunge the knife into the body of his son to kill him. As he raised his arm the angel of the Lord spoke to Abraham.

"Don't hurt the boy or do anything to him," he said. *"Now that I know that you have obedient reverence for God, because you have not kept back your only son from him."* Abraham looked around and saw a ram caught in a bush by its horns. He went and got it and offered it as a burnt offering instead of his son. Abraham names that place *"The Lord Provides."*

"The Lord provides." This is a common theme in the Bible. Right through the pages of Scripture, God is portrayed as the One who sees and cares for all of our needs. We hear about how the very hairs on our head are numbered. We hear of his concern and notice of one sparrow that falls to the ground.

We hear about the three young men, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego who are delivered from the fiery furnace. We hear about Daniel who is delivered from the mouths of lions. David is saved from the giant Goliath.

The Israelites are saved from the Egyptians when God put a path through the sea. And so we could go and on. The Bible is a book about how God loves and provides for his people. In light of life's difficulties many of us wonder sometimes whether God cares about us. We all have difficult situations we must face in life. All of us have needs about which we earnestly pray. We ask God to meet our needs and the needs of others.

Sometimes we ask why God isn't responding the way we want him to. Is God personally involved with our lives? Did God merely create the universe, set it spinning off into space, and then forgot about the ongoing needs of those whom he created?

Or is he available to each one of us here and now? I've asked God for things that he hasn't given me. I've prayed and apparently he hasn't heard me, or at least, he hasn't answered me yet. Does God just simply know what our needs are, or will he actually do something to meet our needs?

We may debate and argue till the cows come home about the God who gives Abraham a son and a promise about grandchildren and great grandchildren, and then asks that he offer his only son as a sacrificial lamb. We could go on for hours and dissect the story - even as a test.

But the fundamental fact remains – Abraham trusted God and believed that he would provide and he did. The Lord provided. I can hear Abraham say to Isaac when he saw the ram caught in the bush, "See that Isaac! I told you the Lord would provide a lamb for the burnt offering."

God will provide. So often we act and speak as if we had to provide. We talk as if everything depended on us. We have to have everything under control, every angle covered. Be hardheaded. Take no risks. The Lord helps those who help themselves, and so forth, we say.

Friends, we all have Isaac, each and everyone of us here this day have an Isaac in our lives, and please don't look at your neighbours' Isaac. You have your own. Something so dear, you just do not want to give it up. Therefore, we will never experience the fullness of God and infilling of the Holy Spirit, and be the persons God would have us be, if we are not willing to offer our Isaac up to God.

..... *My God will satisfy every need of yours according to his riches in Christ Jesus*'. God, who pours, yes pours, his love into your hearts through the Holy Spirit, God will supply your every need.

God will provide. This is a test not only of obedience, but also of our faithfulness. As a believer in Christ we are called to be faithful in little things. We can be scared stiff by the personal problems that we are facing, our financial struggles during this Covid-19 pandemic, lockdowns, and closure of worship places etc.

We can worry about our limited human resources to meet the huge challenges the Lord places before us. Look at all our needs. Are we ready to say that, in full trust God will provide? And then act on what our mouths are saying. We can and we should, because the God whom we serve is faithful and true. This Old Testament event reminds us of our heavenly Father who was prepared to sacrifice his only Son.

God spared not his own Son, but gave him up for us all. God gave his Son for us. Since God did this, will not God in the Son freely give us all things? The real test of love is in the sacrifice that love is willing to make. God's love went to the limit. God might have argued "*Why should I " They will reject it anyway.*" He might have concluded "Leave them alone; they deserve eternal alienation."

But, like Abraham, he took his Son - his only Son whom he loved more dearly than Abraham could ever love Isaac - and put him on the wooden altar shaped into a cross. But unlike Abraham, he didn't stop. His love for us would not let us perish in the hell we deserved.

His love for us compelled him to give the best he had. His love made a loving Father sacrifice his Son. We could sum up what happened on the cross and then on Easter morning with the phrase – *the Lord provides*. His Son was sacrificed so that he could provide forgiveness for all our sin, so that we could be made new as his people.

What we need to see clearly is that God is working out his purpose in our lives. What is important is his plan for us. The good news is that God has a wonderful plan for our lives. And that plan demands that we offer our Isaac to God. He knows what we need, where we need it, and when we need it.

In the midst of the pandemic... Standing on the promises that cannot fail,
When the howling storms of doubt and fear assail, by the living Word of God I shall
prevail, Standing on the promises of God,

"Our God is the God who provides needs."

Amen.

Let all take this time to pray, to encourage and call one another in the household of faith and ALL nurses, doctors, truck drivers, all essential workers etc. They're the ones who were there when you thought you'd never laugh again. They were the ones who listened to you; whereas others just talked. Then ask yourself, "When was the last time I encouraged someone?" It's not difficult, and the people you encourage are so blessed by it.

Make melodies in your heart with these hymns:

- Great Is Thy Faithfulness # 733
- What a Friend We Have in Jesus # 742
- When Peace like a River # 785