

Lent 1 2/18/24
Gen 22:1-18 B

“GOD HIMSELF WILL PROVIDE FOR HIMSELF THE LAMB FOR A BURNT OFFERING, MY SON.”

How could a father do such a thing? More than that, how could God do such a thing? The pagan gods required, demanded, the sacrifice of the firstborn. And now, the God of the Israelites demands the sacrifice of the firstborn. Is He just like all the other gods, no different from the pagan gods?

But, even more than that, this is Abraham’s son of his old age, the seed through whom Abraham was to become the father of kings and a great nation. Was God a liar? God Himself had promised him, “It is through Isaac that your seed will be reckoned,” but now He says, “Take your son, your only-begotten son, Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering.” Who would not hate a God so cruel and contradictory? Who could worship such a God?

Luther once read the words of our Old Testament lesson for family devotions. When he had finished, his wife, Katie, said, “I do not believe it. God would not have treated His son like that.” “But, Katie,” answered Luther, “He did.”

That’s what God is teaching us in our Old Testament lesson: How much He loves us! God is teaching Abraham and us about the love a Father has for His Son.

The key to understanding Abraham’s sacrifice of Isaac is found in his words, “We will worship and then we will come back to you” (v. 5, NIV). In the 11th chapter of Hebrews, we read of Abraham’s faith,

By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises was in the act of offering up his only son,

of whom it was said, "Through Isaac shall your offspring be named." He considered that God was able to raise him from the dead, from which, figuratively speaking, he did receive him back (He 11:17-19).

Abraham believed that if he sacrificed his son, his only-begotten Son, God would raise him from the dead.

Never overlook that the Old Testament looks forward to the New Testament. I remind you of that because of Isaac's words to his father. As they traveled to the altar, Isaac wondered where the lamb for the sacrifice was. Again, we see the faith of Abraham, **"God will provide for Himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son."**

After Abraham built the altar, placed the wood on it, bound Isaac on the altar, and stretched out the knife in his hand, Jesus Christ, the Angel of the Lord, intervened. God did indeed supply a lamb for the offering. Abraham lifted up his eyes and a ram was caught in the thicket by the horns. This Lamb took the place of him who was to die.

Abraham's faith named this place, "The Lord will provide." Abraham was teaching Isaac, the child of promise who had the seed of the messiah in his body, and us, that one day the Lamb of God would come to be sacrificed for the sins of all the world.

This Sunday teaches us THAT THE LAMB GOD PROVIDED FOR HIMSELF FOR THE BURNT OFFERING WAS HIS SON JESUS CHRIST, HIS ONLY-BEGOTTEN SON WHOM HE LOVED.

Like Isaac, we were to die. Our sin demanded death. But, God did not want us to die. So, just as He did for Isaac, He provided a Lamb to die in our place, for our guilt. That Lamb was Jesus. And that Lamb, carrying the sin of all the world, would not let anything, **including Satan**, keep Him from the cross.

The Gospel lesson for the 1st Sunday in Lent is always the temptation of Christ by Satan. The foe knew that this Seed of woman had come to crush his head. He would do that by dying on the cross. So, the devil tried to keep Jesus from the cross. **The temptation Satan put before Jesus in the wilderness was not to go to the cross.**

Jesus' baptism marked the beginning of His public journey to the cross. *The Spirit immediately*, the Evangelist Mark tells us, *drove Him out into the wilderness. And He was in the wilderness forty days, being tempted by Satan (v. 12-13).*

There, Satan tempted Jesus not to go to the cross. The Father had just spoken at His baptism, *"You are My beloved Son; with you I am well pleased"* (v. 11). So, the father of all lies tempts him to doubt the very words of God, *"If you are the Son of God..."* Jesus is very God of very God, having divine powers. So, the foe comes to tempt Jesus to use His power to serve Himself, *"command these stones to become loaves of bread"* (Mt 4:3).

Our first father, Adam, was put to the test and failed and plunged the whole human race into sin. In the wilderness, Israel was put to the test, and failed. So now, at the beginning of His public ministry, Jesus is subjected to the test to see if He will be the true Israelite. Jesus proves Himself faithful, He who lives *"by every word that comes from the mouth of God"* (Mt 4:4).

We all know too well temptations from the father of all lies. Yes, we are to resist the devil, but in the weakness of your mortal nature, you know you can't. So, Jesus went into the wilderness to be tempted and remain faithful, because like Adam and Israel, when we were put to the test, we failed. We sinned. Jesus went to be tempted by the devil for you, in your

place, as your substitute. Jesus withstood the devil's temptation so that His faithfulness would be given to you, to be your own faithfulness before God.

This Lamb Who would go to the cross and suffer and die for your sin and my sin is the faithful, true, spotless lamb, in whom there is no sin. When Abraham raised the knife to kill his son, God did not abandon nor forsake him. When His own Son went to the altar of the cross, God did abandon Him into death. His head was crowned with a crown of thorns. He was bound to the cross with nails. The spear was thrust into His side. And, He gave up His soul, dying the death that our sin deserved.

Christ's sacrifice upon the altar of Calvary teaches us everything that we need to know about God, our Heavenly Father. The thought, the very idea, of a father sacrificing his only-begotten son whom he loves, is almost more than we can comprehend. Yet, that is exactly what God did. The Lamb He supplied to atone for our sins, to be our substitute in death, was His only-begotten Son whom He loved. That is how much God loved us. He was willing to allow His only-begotten Son to die for us and to watch as His Son hung in agony from that wooden rod of torture. The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther said it best: **"We see the deepest into God's heart when we see His Son on the cross."**

Like Abraham, God was able to sacrifice His only-begotten Son whom He loved because He knew about the resurrection of the dead. God knew that even though His only begotten Son, whom He loved, would be buried in the grave, He would rise again on the 3rd day, bursting the bonds of death and the grave.

Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour, St. Peter teaches us (1 Pe 5:8). As the father of all lies came to Christ, he will come to tempt us to sin, shame and vice, doubt

and despair with his lies.

By virtue of your baptism into Christ, His faithfulness to the Father's will is your faithfulness. His victory over sin, death, and the devil is your victory. To be a baptized child of God is to take sides against the devil. He is truly your mighty, lifelong enemy. And, we are helpless to stand. "With might of ours can naught be done," we sing. But, the Good News of the Gospel is that for us fights the Valiant One, Jesus Christ. The evil foe may "scowl fierce as he will, He can harm us none. He's judged; the deed is done" {LSB 656:3}.

Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love Him (Ja 1:12). We do not persevere when tempted by our own reason and strength, it is Christ with us and in us Who "strengthens and keeps us firm in His Word and faith until we die" so that we may receive the crown of life. Amen.