

"After these things God tested Abraham and said to him, "Abraham!" And he said, "Here I am." He said, "Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you." So Abraham rose early in the morning, saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him, and his son Isaac. And he cut the wood for the burnt offering and arose and went to the place of which God had told him. On the third day Abraham lifted up his eyes and saw the place from afar. Then Abraham said to his young men, "Stay here with the donkey; I and the boy will go over there and worship and come again to you." And Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering and laid it on Isaac his son. And he took in his hand the fire and the knife. So they went both of them together. And Isaac said to his father Abraham, "My father!" And he said, "Here I am, my son." He said, "Behold, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?" Abraham said, "God will provide for himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son." So they went both of them together. When they came to the place of which God had told him, Abraham built the altar there and laid the wood in order and bound Isaac his son and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. Then Abraham reached out his hand and took the knife to slaughter his son. But the angel of the Lord called to him from heaven and said, "Abraham, Abraham!" And he said, "Here I am." He said, "Do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him, for now I know that you fear God, seeing you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me." And Abraham lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, behind him was a ram, caught in a thicket by his horns. And Abraham went and took the ram and offered it up as a burnt offering instead of his son. So Abraham called the name of that place, "The Lord will provide"; as it is said to this day, "On the mount of the Lord it shall be provided.""
Genesis 22:1-14

Have you ever looked out your window and you see your children playing in the backyard? They are on their swings or they are running around. Something just hits you at that moment and you love them with all your heart. You always do love them, even I suppose when they are breaking your heart. But in moments like these you just love them. You hear them perhaps a little older laughing out in the driveway where they are shooting a few hoops at the backboard you put up there a few years ago. They are laughing and having the best of times. Again, you just smile and remember how wonderful it has been. Even when they are older like mine are now you still have a wonder and awe and pride in

them that reminds you that no matter what happens in life these blessings are among the best.

Abraham and Sarah must have felt that when they looked at Isaac their son. Every parent says, “My child is the most special.” But they truly had reason to remember the specialness of Isaac. They were both old – Abraham was 75 and Sarah was 65. They never had children of their own. They had everything in life. They had prosperity and property and so many earthly blessings. But this one area of joy was denied to them. But then God came to Abraham suddenly and told them that they would indeed have a child, a miracle child, given to them well after people had children. Then he came and Abraham and Sarah even named him “Isaac” which means “laughter”. He was the delight. He was the promised child and the blessed evidence that God had never forgotten them. All of this was in Genesis 21, the chapter right before our story today. Chapter 21 was all about the wanderings of Abraham and Sarah throughout the land. But it was always with this special ray of sunshine in their lives – this Isaac – the joy of their old age and the joy of their entire lives. God had been so good to them. He could be puzzling, yes. But He had been so good to them.

Then came Genesis 22. Out of the blue this wonderful God of blessing says to Abraham, “Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you.” Now all we read is that the next day, early in the morning, Abraham set out with Isaac and headed to the place God had directed him. But what must have been going

through the mind of this man of faith? In fact, there really are two other people of faith in the story and I wonder what they had been thinking.

Did Abraham entirely fill Sarah his wife in on what God had ordered him to do? She knew about offerings to be given to God and she knew about burnt offerings. Abraham is taking Isaac and heading on a long journey. Why? Couldn't he have offered a lamb right where they were? Why did Isaac have to go with him? – and where was the lamb for the offering? Did Sarah put two and two together? We don't know. But this Isaac was not the son, the only son, the one whom Abraham loved. This was Sarah's only son and she loved him too. Sarah did not protest. But did she know in her heart that perhaps she might never see her beloved son again? “Moriah” ironically has the same verbal roots as the name “Mary” believe it or not. Was Sarah like another mother watching her son march away from her to walk the path that God had given Him – and all she could do was watch Jesus her son whom she loved, walk away from her?

Isaac is a man of faith. It does not say how old he was exactly in this text. But in a general way you can figure out that he is probably a teenager, maybe reaching even the age of twenty or so. He has his questions. He knows something is going on – “Where is the lamb?” I do not know if we ever pause to think about the faith of Isaac here. When the final moment does come and he learns what his father intends for him, in a passage where “father” appears twice and “son” appears seven times, this virile young man could easily have overpowered Abraham who is well over 100 years old. He could have said, “My father wants to kill me because in some kind of schizophrenic nightmare he thinks he is hearing voices from God!” Isaac could easily have run away at the very least. But he

allows his father to do what he does because Isaac has faith in the God he also has come to know and love through the years.

Then of course there is Abraham. This is his son. He loves this son. This is the son God had given to him in a miracle – and now God wants to take him away from Abraham. If this is not a test of faith what is? The New Testament says that Abraham may have hoped in a kind of resurrection, that the same God who created Isaac with a miracle might also raise him after Abraham had done what he had been ordered to do. But why a journey of three days and more? Why did Abraham’s heart have to be tortured as he walked with Isaac, as he laid the wood upon Isaac’s back who carried it up the mountain? Why did Isaac have to lay down upon the wood and be bound there? Why did it even have to happen in the first place? These were the disgusting customs of the very people God had condemned for doing these kinds of human sacrifice things. God is not acting like God at all. In fact – this entire thing makes no sense. It makes no sense at all. God makes no sense at all.

People of God – what do you do when God makes no sense? You are loved by the Lord. You hear it all the time here at Our Savior. You read it in the Bible. You know that you are a child of the God you have come to know is your Father in heaven – our Father, who art in heaven – hallowed by Thy Name. But then you lose your job unexpectedly and the bills pile up. The doctor tells you a diagnosis that makes you go white and shakes you to the core. Your spouse tells you at the breakfast table that they want a divorce because they don’t love you anymore. Your children get hurt or bullied at school. We could go down the list for hours but in the end you are asking God “Why?” You’re the good guys.

You are the children of the Lord. You blame yourself and you ask if you sinned or did something to make God angry at you but you know God forgave you all your sins. Does God hate me after all? God, this makes absolutely no sense. I cannot understand You. And what do you do, Child of God, when God makes no sense at all?

You trust in Him. You trust in Him that He loves you, that He knows all things, and that He has a plan for you. Even when you cannot see what it is. You trust in Him, as Abraham did. That was the real test. It was not only the question of whether Abraham would do what he had been asked by God to do. It was whether Abraham could trust God with the faith to believe God even when all of this Genesis 22 stuff made no sense. That is his call to you and me – to a trust that is all over the Word of God. *“And those who know your name put their trust in you, for you, O LORD, have not forsaken those who seek you.”* Psalm 9:10 *“O my God, in you I trust; let me not be put to shame; let not my enemies exult over me.”* Psalm 25:2 *“The LORD is my strength and my shield; in him my heart trusts, and I am helped; my heart exults, and with my song I give thanks to him.”* Psalm 28:7 *“Many are the sorrows of the wicked, but steadfast love surrounds the one who trusts in the LORD.”* Psalm 32:10 *“You who fear the LORD, trust in the LORD! He is their help and their shield.”* Psalm 115:11 Especially when we are perplexed and troubled and we are afraid you and I can hear the Bible tell us: *“Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding.”* (Proverbs 3:5) and something especially meaningful to me and meant something to me when I lay in the emergency room of Charlotte Hungerford Hospital and heard the doctor tell me I was having a heart attack: *“When I am afraid, I put my trust in you. In God, whose word I praise, in God I trust; I shall not be*

afraid." Psalm 56:3–4 Why oh why, children of God, are we so reluctant to admit that we are afraid? Sometimes I think it is because we Christians won't allow our hearts to be afraid. "I'm a person of faith. People who trust in God don't get afraid. It's a sign of weak faith if I'm afraid." Where in the world did you ever get that idea? It is especially when we are afraid that our God comes to us and draws near to our hearts. He surrounds us when we are terrified and puts His almighty arms around us and He holds us through it all.

I know this because there was another son once. In Matthew 13 you would have heard God the Father say of Him, "This is my beloved son." Mark 1:1 "You are my beloved son." At the Transfiguration the voice of the Father again, "This is my beloved son." Matthew 17. John 3:16 says to us all of God the Father that, "He so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son." And did you know that in Jesus' day on top of Mt. Moriah you would have found the Temple of Jerusalem where all the burnt sacrifices were offered by the priests in Jerusalem? And did you know that if Jesus stood there He might have looked down at "one of the mountains" that Abraham himself could have looked down on, or perhaps it was the very mountain in the land of Moriah on which Abraham was going to offer Isaac his son – we don't know for sure. But in Abraham's day this mountain did not have a name. But in Jesus' day it did. It went by the name of Mt. Calvary -Golgatha. It was a place where crosses were found.

Jesus like Abraham and Isaac made that journey to the place God the Father had directed Him. Isaac had the wood laid on his back and in John 19:17 it says of Jesus: "and he went out bearing his own cross." Isaac was bound and laid upon the wood. Jesus had His hands and feet bound as He was laid down by the soldiers on the wood of the cross.

Isaac was spared and a substitute ram was found for him. Jesus was not spared -He was the substitute for us all – and God the Father saw His own Son die for the world and the people He loved – for you and for me.

On those times and days when God makes no sense and you wonder if you can trust in His love for you remember Jesus the Lamb of God. Does God really love me when He makes no sense to me? I remember the words of the song: "He gave His life... what more could He give? Oh how He loves you. Oh how He loves me. Oh how He loves you and me."

This is the Jesus Who says in Hebrews 13:5: "I will never leave you nor forsake you-" where the word for "never" appears actually five times in that verse, where the actual literal translation of Hebrews 13:5 has Jesus saying to you: "I will never, never, never, never, never leave you nor forsake you." This is the Jesus Who says to you, "I am with you always, even to the end." (Matthew 28:20) Those are words you can understand. Those are words that shine in our dark worlds. They drown out the words of doctors and lawyers. They overcome the words of hurt and sorrow we endure in life. In a way I guess, when I look at Jesus dying such a horrid death for someone in me who absolutely does not deserve such love – I can't figure that out anymore than I can some of the other puzzling things of God and what He has done or allowed to be done in my life. But maybe I don't have to figure it out. Nor you. Maybe, as Abraham did long ago, we could simply trust in the Lord of love: *"Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding."* Lean on Him instead. Amen.