

The reading is Genesis 22:1-14

Abraham tested

22 Some time later God tested Abraham. He said to him, 'Abraham!'

'Here I am,' he replied.

²Then God said, 'Take your son, your only son, whom you love – Isaac – and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on a mountain that I will show you.'

³Early the next morning Abraham got up and loaded his donkey. He took with him two of his servants and his son Isaac. When he had cut enough wood for the burnt offering, he set out for the place God had told him about. ⁴On the third day Abraham looked up and saw the place in the distance. ⁵He said to his servants, 'Stay here with the donkey while I and the boy go over there. We will worship and then we will come back to you.'

⁶Abraham took the wood for the burnt offering and placed it on his son Isaac, and he himself carried the fire and the knife. As the two of them went on together, ⁷Isaac spoke up and said to his father Abraham, 'Father?'

'Yes, my son?' Abraham replied.

'The fire and wood are here,' Isaac said, 'but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?'

⁸Abraham answered, 'God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son.' And the two of them went on together.

⁹When they reached the place God had told him about, Abraham built an altar there and arranged the wood on it. He bound his son Isaac and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. ¹⁰Then he reached out his hand and took the knife to slay his son. ¹¹But the angel of the Lord called out to him from heaven, 'Abraham! Abraham!'

'Here I am,' he replied.

¹²'Do not lay a hand on the boy,' he said. 'Do not do anything to him. Now I know that you fear God, because you have not withheld from me your son, your only son.'

¹³Abraham looked up and there in a thicket he saw a ram^(a) caught by its horns. He went over and took the ram and sacrificed it as a burnt offering instead of his son. ¹⁴So Abraham called that place The Lord Will Provide. And to this day it is said, 'On the mountain of the Lord it will be provided.'

First of all I want to make a theological point about this strange and disturbing story.

It's what theologians call a Type or Pre-Figuring.

It's as if this event is a prophecy of an event to come in the future...it mirrors it in some way and it's not hard to guess what this story pre-figures.

A Father is to give his son as a sacrifice.

The son carries the wood that is to be his own funeral.

The son is bound and prepared for death.

There the story of Abraham & Isaac has a different end to the story of Jesus.

There are other powerful moments in this story.

Isaac asks "where is the lamb for the burnt offering" and Abraham answers "God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering".

God did indeed provide the Lamb both for Abraham and for all of us when Jesus came to the cross.

Perhaps the most telling difference in the two stories – between Abraham and Jesus – is that Jesus was willing to accept his mission. It was a tremendous struggle in the Garden of Gethsemane but he accepted God's purpose. I don't think for a second Isaac would have acted the same way and Alex* has captured the shock and horror of being bound for the altar.

There are other links but one last one. Abraham went to the mountain of Moriah. Today that place has great significance. It's the Dome on the Rock in Jerusalem. Deep underneath is a rock where they believe this event took place.

So – it's a pre-figuring providing the source material for understanding something that happened many hundreds of years later. Jesus the son died on the cross in our place, just as a Ram was provided by God, to die instead of Isaac.

But what did this mean to the two of them – to Abraham and Isaac??? What was it all about??

Abraham is rightly celebrated as the father of faith. You only have to dip into the New Testament to see a variety of writers all harking back to Abraham's faith.

In Hebrews and in Romans and in James.

And what happened when Zacchaeus turned his life around??? – Jesus says...here now is a true son of Abraham!

Abraham is venerated for having total faith which meant he was willing to go through with a bizarre request from God – a request which seemed to contradict God's own promise and purpose.

No wonder he holds such an important place in the faith story. Abraham was put into an unprecedented and bizarre situation and he is proved genuine and firm in his faith.

(* Alex has provided 12 pictures to illustrate this story – I'll include them at the end)

In Hebrews it tells us that Abraham believed that God could raise Isaac from the dead to fulfil the promise of a nation. What astonishing faith – and where on earth did he ever think that one up??? His faith is proved complete.

And I've been wondering about Isaac. We all know what impact traumatic incidents can have on us. How did this shocking story impact him??

It seems to have developed in him the same trust and commitment in God as his father had shown. He called on the name of the Lord he committed himself to God. You might think he would run a mile...but whatever God was doing, he was doing in Isaac as well as in Abraham.

What does this story mean for us today?

One lesson we cannot escape. There are times God tests our faith. Of course there are an awful lot of times when God allows the circumstances we are in to be a test of faith. Our health or wealth or relationships, or work, or home...all manner of things can "test our faith".

This story and the story of Job and others in the bible shows that there are times God tests our faith. That is a challenge.

In fact it's SUCH a challenge that Jesus told us that we should pray that we are NOT led into a time of temptation... that's a line from the Lord's prayer. Even so God does test. (NB – tempting and testing much more similar meaning as words.)

But If that is making you nervous...there is a wealth of evidence to encourage our faith.

In Corinthians St.Paul says this.

¹³No temptation^[a] has overtaken you except what is common to mankind. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted^[a] beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted,^[a] he will also provide a way out so that you can endure it.

The Message Translation - ¹³No test or temptation that comes your way is beyond the course of what others have had to face. All you need to remember is that God will never let you down; he'll never let you be pushed past your limit; he'll always be there to help you come through it.

And even though God does test, he himself provides answers as he did for Abraham.

Gods purpose is always the refining and development of our souls. No-one wants to suffer, no one wants to be tested or tempted...but ultimately we all come to face the same question.

To trust God or not. Now last week Jane quoted Eugene Peterson "*Life's basic decision is rarely ever to believe in God or not, but whether to worship or compete with him*".

We've gone beyond the basic question....we've decided to worship not compete.

When HE decides to test us – or allows a severe test the question is do I still trust him or not?

To have faith in the Father who gave his only son – or to try and find another way.

Sometimes – and this is hard – we don't always understand what it's all been about.

When we ask WHY – or What's that all about??? – there isn't always a neat and tidy answer and often no answer at all!They travel on alone

But I believe with all my heart and through all my experience...that God longs for me to experience His faithfulness, love and mercy. If he allows a test or creates a test and never explains why it's so that I may experience Him in the fullest measure possible.

My final proof is the only proof ever needed. The cross.

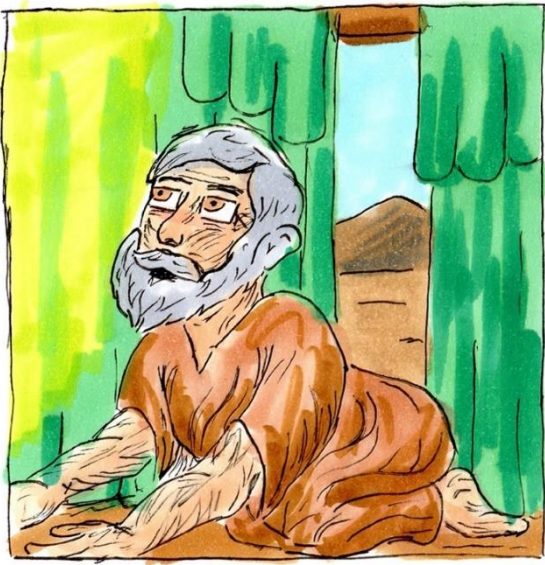
As St.Paul says in Romans chapter 8

³²He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?

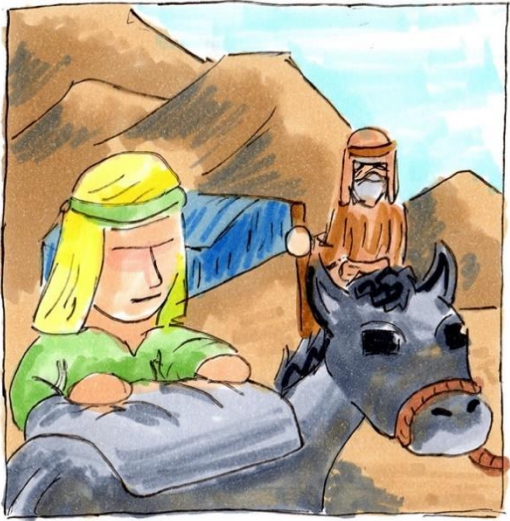
Let us pray.

Lead us not into temptation
Bring us not to a time of trial.

And yet Lord – complete in us the work you have begun, that we might be transformed and experience in the deepest places of our souls the work of grace and healing we require. Amen



God calls to Abraham



They prepare for the journey



They travel



Stay here while we go and worship



They travel on alone



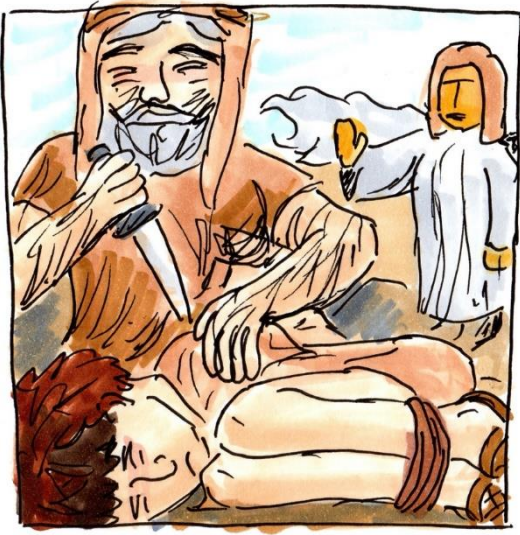
Father where is the lamb?



Isaac is bound



And placed on the altar



Abraham – Abraham STOP!!



Now I know you are faithful



The Ram is spotted



A-M-K

They sacrifice together.