

The 1st Sunday in Lent
February 21, 2021

The Lessons: Genesis 22:1-18
 Psalm 32:1-7
 Romans 5:12-19
 Matthew 4:1-11

The Hymns: # 656 (1-4) *A Mighty Fortress Is Our God*
 # 547 (1-3) *The Lamb*
 # 798 (1-3) *The God of Abraham Praise*

The Collect: O Lord God, You led Your ancient people through the wilderness and brought them to the promised land. Guide the people of Your Church that following our Savior we may walk through the wilderness of this world toward the glory of the world to come; through Jesus Christ, Your son, our Lord, who lives and reign with You and the Holy Spirit, One God, now and forever. Amen.

The Sermon:
 The Test of Faith
 Genesis 22:1-18

“After these things, God tested Abraham”

Dear friends in Christ,

This past Wednesday we entered the Season of Lent — 40 days of preparation — a time for us to prepare our hearts for the Sacrifice of Jesus. It’s a time for us to think about what our Lord gave up for us – what He sacrificed when He travelled that lonely cross to Calvary. During Lent, we often make a pledge to give up something for Lent. What is hard for you to give up? The hardest things to give up are the things we love deeply. Why is it hard to give up something you love so much? For me it’s those goodies from Sugared and Spiced Bakery and chocolate covered almonds. What is it for you?

God asked Abraham to give up something. What was it? That’s right, Abraham was asked to give up his son, Isaac. The Bible tells us that this was a test for Abraham. Let’s pretend this morning that you are students in a classroom. I am going to ask you some questions. Students are always taking tests. There are different kinds of tests. I’d like you to think about what kind of a test it was for Abraham. Some people think that this was a test of Abraham’s obedience.

Think about that for a minute. A test of obedience is something that tests whether or not you will obey a direct command from someone who has authority over you. Did your teacher ever test your obedience? How? Why might a teacher test your obedience? Did your parents ever test your obedience? Was Abraham obedient to God? Was there someone else who was obedient in this story?

There is another kind of test that this might have been. Some of you may remember tests you had at school. What kind of a test was it? Well, it was probably a test of your knowledge. Why

do teachers want to test your knowledge? So they can chart your progress on a report card for the principal and parents to review.

There is a third kind of test that I want you to think about this morning. (The first test was the test of obedience. The second test was the test for knowledge). The third test is a test of faith. A test of faith is different from a test of obedience or a test of knowledge. A test of faith is a test that begins not with a command, but with a promise. Suppose your teacher at the beginning of the year had said something like this: "Class, I want to make you a promise. You and I are going to have a great time this year. We are going to have to review some things that you learned last year and we will be learning some interesting new things. These things that we learn will help you in your life and will prepare you for what is to come next year. And I make you a promise that I will work very hard to get you ready so that by the end of the year you will be prepared to enter the next grade. This work is something we will have to do together. I promise to teach and help you learn. That's my part. I will encourage you and help keep you on the right track so you can achieve the goal of moving on to the next grade. When you get behind I will warn you. When you do well, I will praise you. There will be times when you will be upset about things and when you don't feel much like learning. I promise to be there to help keep you going."

"You have a part in this task too. Your part is to trust me. Sometimes I will challenge you. I will give you homework assignments to do. I will expect you to pay attention in class. I will give you tests and report cards so that you can know how well you are doing. You may not like some of the things I ask you to do, but I want you to trust that the things I ask you to do will be for your good — to help you succeed as a student and to help you succeed in your life." Now, you want to believe your teacher's promise and so you decide at the beginning of the year to do your best to have faith in your teacher and to work with your teacher to achieve those goals. This is a test of your faith in the promises of your teacher.

Abraham's test, more than anything else was a test of faith. It was not a test of knowledge or even a test of obedience. God had made Abraham a promise. His descendants would become a great nation and through him all the nations of the world would be blessed. But Abraham had no son — until he was almost 100 years old. It began to look like Abraham had trusted God in vain. But then God kept his promise to Abraham and Sarah and gave them Isaac, their own son.

But now, about 12 years later, God asked Abraham to offer Isaac as a sacrifice. He was to take his own son, the son of the promise, to the top of a mountain and offer him like a sacrificial animal! What do you think went through Abraham's mind? How was this a test of Abraham's faith? He might have doubted that God would keep his promise. He might have wondered why God would make a promise and then keep the promise after so many years, only now to take the promise away again. He might have been tempted to say "No, God, I won't believe in you any more." But he didn't say that. He did believe in God. He believed in God's promise! Maybe like you believe in your teacher.

Abraham found out that God is faithful and that God does keep his promise, for at the last minute the Angel of the Lord told Abraham not to kill his son. The Lord provided a substitute sacrifice for Isaac — a ram caught in the bushes. How are we when it comes to passing tests? How about the test of obedience? How about the test of our knowledge of God's Word? How are we when it comes to passing the test of faith? We don't do very well at keeping the 10

commandments, do we? We fail the test of obedience every day. We don't do very well when it comes to the test of knowledge because we have failed to read and study God's Holy Word the way we should. And we don't do very well when it comes to the test of faith either. How about when it comes to trusting God when we have troubles in life? We so quickly begin to think that God doesn't care about us, that he doesn't love us.

When we see others who make fun of God, who dismiss God as unimportant, and who laugh at our faith, then it may be hard to remain faithful to God. But even though we do not have the faith of Abraham and even though over and over again we disobey God, one thing is certain. God keeps his promises to us. He gave his own Son as a substitute (like that Ram) for us so that we would not have to die forever.

Think about Jesus as our Ram for a minute. You know what rams are like. They're tough – like the Dodge Ram 2400 – guts and glory tough. Jesus was even tougher out there in the wilderness for 40 days, tempted by the Devil. The Devil kept after Him, tempting Him with everything he could think of to make Jesus abandon His mission to save us. Jesus had just been baptized in the Jordan River. He had just heard the voice of his Father: "You are my beloved Son". The Spirit anointed Him for His ministry and mission of reconciling the world to God. But then that same Spirit drove Him out into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. Three times Satan tested Jesus to give up on His Father's Promise. Three times he tried to persuade Jesus that He was not really God's beloved Son. But Jesus was tough and he was determined – determined to go all the way to the cross to be our substitute. And that's exactly what He did. Nothing could turn him away from that awesome plan of the Father – to accomplish the salvation of the world.

In **your** baptism God has made you wonderful promises. There He has promised to be your God, to love you and to protect you from the evil one. He promised to forgive your sins and to be with you through all of life's troubles and problems. Even more than your teacher, God has promised to help you grow, to encourage you and even to give you His Holy Spirit to guide you through this life — so that one day you will know the eternal life of heaven.

My friends, whenever your faith is tested, remember God's promises. Whenever your faith is tested, remember how God has been faithful to you in the past and has kept all his promises. Whenever your faith is tested, remember the ultimate fulfillment of God's promise, that in Jesus Christ all your sins are forgiven. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.