**Gen 22:1-18 (ESV)**

**1** After these things God tested Abraham and said to him, “Abraham!” And he said, “Here am I.” **2** 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.” **3** 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. **4** On the third day Abraham lifted up his eyes and saw the place from afar. **5** 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.” **6** 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. **7** And Isaac said to his father Abraham, “My father!” And he said, “Here am I, my son.” He said, “Behold, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?” **8** Abraham said, “God will provide for himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son.” So they went both of them together. **9** 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. **10** Then Abraham reached out his hand and took the knife to slaughter his son. **11** But the angel of the Lord called to him from heaven and said, “Abraham, Abraham!” And he said, “Here am I.” **12** 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.” **13** 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. **14** 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.” **15** And the angel of the Lord called to Abraham a second time from heaven **16** and said, “By myself I have sworn, declares the Lord, because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, **17** I will surely bless you, and I will surely multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore. And your offspring shall possess the gate of his enemies, **18** and in your offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed, because you have obeyed my voice.”

**“Hardship Has An Answer”**

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, Amen. One of the blessings in our time is we have many options. Choices abound from what to buy at a store, to the time it takes to pick off the menu, to how long a person wants to go to school, to the various cures to receive for better health. Yet, a danger with having so many choices is to end up treating all these options as equal. As if, marriage between a man and woman is no different than living together. As if, extra-curricular activities will never get in the way of a child’s spiritual life at church. As if, my personal interests or goals have no effect on anyone else. What happens when all other choices are wrong, but one? What if there were no more choices to choose from?

 Being baptized into Christ is by far harder than having no baptism at all. It means we know and confess that God did not have options in saving a sinful world. There was only once choice. The heavenly Father had to sacrifice His one and only Son. No greater text in the Old Testament provides such a clear picture of the Gospel than Abraham having to sacrifice Isaac. As we start out on this first Sunday in Lent, the First Commandment makes its charge against us in our time of so many choices. As the small Catechism explains, “Whatever you fear, love, and trust this is your God.” The Devil tempts us away into sin and false belief, while God tests His baptized in order to strengthen faith in Him. Hardship has an answer: God will provide.

 Of all others in the past, Abraham is the “Father of faith” and it is for no small reason. God had called him away from his homeland and family to the land He chose for him. Abraham and Sarah had no choice in having to wait 25 years until the birth of Isaac. Finally, the climax came upon Abraham when years later he had to choose death rather than some other way for life. More than just having to kill his own flesh in the face of Isaac. The deeper challenge was to very promise made by God who said, “I will establish my covenant with him (Isaac) as an everlasting covenant…” (Genesis 17:19b). The Word of God to sacrifice Isaac challenged the Word of God that said salvation would come through Isaac. Abraham did not waver against God’s Will. And when the fearful question arose from Isaac about “Where was the sacrifice?” This Father of faith spoke against what he feared saying, “God will provide for himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son.” Hardship had an answer.

God provides words to speak to the questions we fear. It does not mean the situation all of sudden suites our ways. Abraham had no smile when having to sacrifice Isaac. Apart from the promise given in baptism, our Old Adam wants other options. He attempts to avoid suffering God’s Will and even questions His Word. With the rest of a sinful humanity, we easily run off to fear everything else, but the faithfulness of God. Our Lutheran Fathers state, “…All men are full of evil lust and inclinations from their mothers’ womb and are unable by nature to have true fear of God and true faith in God” (Tappert 29:1). Fears find an answer in baptism. It is here where Jesus claims to bear all suffering from sin and perfectly submits to serving God’s Will. Not even Abraham could answer his son Isaac, like the Father in heaven who said, “You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased.” Rather than stepping away from God’s Word, the Word steps into our life by water. It means the answer is more fearful than any question: God will provide.

Fearing God rightly comes from His Love. As much as Abraham could answer Isaac’s question, when the time came to kill him. Only God could save this “Father of faith.” None can sustain true faith on their own. It must be spoken to save sinners. This is why the Angel of the Lord declared at just the right time, “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.” This test of God was not to destroy faith, but a love to strengthen him in a more promising Word. After the angel of the Lord preached to his deepest pain. God also provided a better comfort for Abraham to see. A lamb replaced the life of his son, which he gladly received. Hardship had an answer.

God provides a sacrifice for the suffering to receive in love. The strength of the baptized is in Jesus. Abraham might be the father of faith, but Jesus is the reason we love God. None other puts the Devil to shame who tempts us so much. God is the suffering servant in our place. St. Paul says in Romans, “He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?” (8:32) Not everyone is so fortunate in getting back their child like Abraham. Some suffering in life has no relief, but God provides the promise of His Son. C. S. Lewis states, “God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks to our conscience, but shouts to our pains: it is His megaphone to rouse a deaf world” (The Problem of Pain 83). Preaching the cross seems nominal and hostile, but it goes out to the suffering. Those broken by the Law are to lift up their eyes to what God’s love provides. In this sacrament, all the saints have a small Easter during Lent saying, “Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!” (Revelation 5:12).

 Where there is fear and love, so trust in God is the greatest hope we have. “…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.” Long after Abraham, that “place” on mount Moriah would become the location for Jerusalem and the temple. It would also be where God’s Son would place Himself outside the temple and city to die by the hand of His Father on mount Golgotha. The oath God swore to Abraham was “in your offspring shall the nations of the earth be blessed because you have obeyed my voice.” It was to our benefit that Abraham believed and by grace was obedient to the Word above all. The sacrifice was worth it, because God had a better way of salvation. Hardship throughout a sinful world has an answer.

 God provides a place to entrust praise to Him for His undying love toward us. It happens to be where Jesus also delivers the gifts of His Word and sacraments. Yet, trust in our time is fading. Luther exhorts the baptized,

“There certainly is no reason for us to think that God is pleased with that doubt and mistrust in us. Indeed, this one sin is by far the gravest of all the sins which will condemn the world and the unbelievers…To believe these most glorious promises and to expect these blessings from God with firm confidence is true faith. And God wants our hearts to be aroused to this confidence not only by the examples of Abraham and others—and not only by His promises—but also because He has given His own Son for us, to be a gift and a pledge of heavenly blessings.”[[1]](#footnote-1)

In order to have trust in God and with each other. It is to know hardship has an answer: God will provide. He gives a word to speak without fear, a sacrifice to receive in love, and a place to entrust praise to His Holy Name. Amen. Now may the peace of God, which passes all understanding, be with your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus to life everlasting, Amen.

1. Luther, M. (1999, c1964). *Vol. 4*: *Luther's works, vol. 4 : Lectures on Genesis: Chapters 21-25* (J. J. Pelikan, H. C. Oswald & H. T. Lehmann, Ed.). Luther's Works (Ge 22:17). Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)