

Texts: Genesis 22:1-14, Matthew 10:40-42

There are some things in life that you just can't change; you learn to accept them. We learn, as we mature, to take both the good and the bad. After 35 years at this preaching craft, after returning, numerous times, to challenging and puzzling scriptures that I've never found my peace with, I'm learning to accept them. They're not going to go away. Like this one in Genesis. We read at the start: "God tested Abraham". "God said, 'Take your son, your only son whom you love, Isaac, and go to the land of Moriah. Offer him up as an entirely burned offering there on one of the mountains that I will show you.'"

That's just troubling, extremely disturbing. The idea of child sacrifice in the first place. That God would choose this way to test Abraham, who had faithfully waited for over twenty years for the birth of son, with this child who represents the only fragile link to the future God promised, by making this horrifying request. "Sacrifice your only son, whom you love, Isaac." I am always disturbed by this, I imagine you are too. But it's not going away. We've not been given license to edit the Bible and remove out those passages that we don't meet our approval. So, there it is; I accept it's there. And it's our Old Testament reading for this morning. At least the lectionary didn't choose it for Father's Day! So, what good can we find in this passage? We easily hear the bad, where's the good? Where's the grace?

The way it begins tells us that it will very location focused. At the start, the Lord calls out, "Abraham!" and Abraham says, "I'm here". This is not an unusual kind of check-in in the Bible; it's almost standard formula. The Lord shouts the name of a person, like Moses, or a prophet, and they respond: "Here I am". *Aqui. Present. From here,* Abraham is told by God to go to the land of Moriah, a three-day journey. The name of that place, Moriah, is loosely based on the Hebrew verb "to see". Called to go from here to "Let's see"; Abraham went. This, we recall, is one of Abraham's strong suits: he goes. Back in chapter 12, God asked him to leave his first here, Haran, which got this whole ball of wax started. Abraham went. By faith.

Where did he go? At the start, the destination clearly sounds like a journey straight into pain and loss, meaningless pain and loss I might add, at the instigation of God, but, in the end, it will turn out to be a much different place. At the prompting of an involved, directing God, Abraham went. How did he go? By faith.

We have no record of hesitation on Abraham's part, no mention of his questioning God, no arguing nor any internal ruminating. He went. Abraham had had an extended long-term relationship with the Lord. When God said "Go", he went. All the way; he was all in. He split the wood for the burnt offering and went to the place God described to him. That exact place.

I've learned during my own long-term relationship with God, that I don't know much about the place to which God calls me till I get there. I usually have it all wrong at the start. I think it's going to be scary, but it turns out not so. I'll feel ill-equipped, inadequate, or stupid, but I'm not. Or those other times, when I pick a place on my own,

a place where I think God wants me to be, it doesn't take long for things to unravel and fall apart. Abraham knew what he was doing. He split the wood and went to the place God described to him.

"On the third day, Abraham looked up and saw the place at a distance." He tells his servants to stay there, with the donkey. "The boy and I will walk up there, worship, and then come back to you." What did Abraham see, off in the distance, to know that? This is the man who sat with God at night, looked up at the stars, and saw the number of his descendants. "The boy and I will walk up there, worship and then come back to you." He went, by faith.

Sometimes that distant place where we're headed, the far-off spot on our faith journey, begins to take on a different look, as we get closer. We go, by faith. Following the call from the Lord. Between here and there, something changes within us. We see things in a different light. We grasp new learnings about the saving love of God. The long, slow faith walk does a number on us. Uncertainty and anxiety calm down. Insecurities and self-consciousness drift away. Doom and gloom don't last for the whole journey. We let go of fear. Confidence and courage rise. We go, as God calls. We find ourselves in an entirely new and different place, even before we get there.

The two walked on. Isaac asked, "My father?" "I'm here, my son." Again, a firm grip on location, knowing where one is. Knowing what's going on; no illusions. "Isaac said, 'Here is the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for the burned offering?'" "The lamb for the burned offering? God will see to it, my son." They are not there yet, in the story, or by geography, however, Abraham names the place: God will see to it. At the conclusion, Abraham will name the place: "The Lord sees" or "The Lord will see to it" or "The Lord provides".

Knowing clearly where he is, and who he is (he's an expert altar builder), we read that Abraham built an altar, arranged the wood, tied up his son, laid him on the altar, stretched out his hand, and raised the knife. Could the writer get any more dramatic with the details? Can we get any more uncomfortable with the entire story than at this climactic moment? When our life journeys take us to a similar spot, when life spirals out of control, when pain and loss mount to unbearable levels. When we are holding onto fragile faith, while faith only appears to bring us more misery and useless suffering, with no change on the horizon. A messenger from heaven called out: "Abraham? Abraham?" And Abraham said, "I'm here." The Lord will see to it. Look, there's a ram.

There is a table, with the bread, with the cup. With the promises, with the Lord. Here. The Lord sees. The Lord provides. The Lord will see to it. This is exactly where you and I are. The Lord called us, by name. We have arrived here, by faith.