

## Sermon: The Lord Will Provide

(Preached by the Rev. Paul Wu, at St. Giles PC, May 22, 2022)

May the words of my mouth and the meditation of our hearts  
be acceptable to you. O Lord, our rock and our redeemer. Amen.

We are going on a journey. Some would say that life itself already is a journey. For those who are familiar with the Scripture, with the story of the Garden of Eden, it could be said that ever since humanity was driven out of that paradise, we have been on a journey ever since—a journey to that ever elusive paradise lost, where we could never again return. If there is no going back, then the journey that we embark on could only go forward.

A journey is typically consisted of waypoints and destination. It is my hope that for seven Sundays, I will be your guide on this journey, in what I have titled: the Mountains of Israel. I will lead you onto a number of significant mountaintop waypoints, where the faith of God's people was formed, tested, torn apart, rebuild and magnified. This journey is not just a history lesson of the community of faith, rather through this process, our own faith is also being shaped and moulded, with the hope of that final consummation taking place at Mount Zion, the mountain of the Lord, in accordance to the vision of Prophet Isaiah, in chapter 2 verse 2-3, "*In days to come the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established as the highest of the mountains and shall be raised above the hills; all the nations shall stream to it. Many people shall come and say, 'Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord.'*"

But before we get there, our first waypoint is Mount Moriah, where Abraham almost sacrificed his only beloved son Isaac. Have you ever wonder why Abraham is called the 'father of faith'? What so special about Abraham's faith that God credits to him as righteousness?

The story of Abraham is recorded in the book of Genesis, starting in chapter 12, where he initially responded to God's call, "*Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.*"

Though Abraham packed up his all belongings and went, his journey was anything but faithful. The 'lack of faith' might be a more appropriate term to describe Abraham. As he and his wife Sarai journeyed through the land of Canaan, a rather foreign land to them, he pretended that Sarai was his sister because she was very beautiful. He thought, should powerful rulers of that land take interest in Sarai, pretending to be her brother instead of her husband, might give him a better chance not to be killed. Though God did come to his aid and rescue, Abraham later pull the same stunt again, not once but twice. His lack of trust in God's protection and provision is really quite jarring.

Abraham's lack of faith was also on display, in the whole episode with Hagar, that is Sarah's servant girl. Though God had repeatedly promised that an offspring will come out of Sarah, that promised was delayed. Then the weak-willed Abraham complied with Sarah's scheme to sleep with Hagar so to bear him a son, Ishmael, through an illegitimate way. I won't go into all the details, but suffice to say it ended in complete disaster, a sad display of doubt and human folly.

So how is it a seemingly weak and foolish man like Abraham came to be known as the father of faith? It all hinges on what happened on top Mount Moriah. The story in Genesis 22 starts with God putting Abraham's faith to the test. We as reader may know that God was testing him, but Abraham did not, not for certain. From time to time God does test us, through various means and challenges, to reveal to us our inner most thoughts, forcing us to confront the crucial question of 'why do we worship God?'.

So God called out to Abraham, and he replied, "Here I am." "Here I am!" We will come across this same reply a total of three times in this chapter, each marking a significant point in this story. So God commanded 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 that I shall show you.*"

Human sacrifice was an accepted practice in the land of Canaan, as part of worshipping other false deities. However, in so far as the worship of the LORD God, the one and only true God of creation and salvation, human sacrifice has never been part of faith. Making this matter worse, the object of this sacrificial demand, is none other than Issac, the heir to the covenantal promise that God originally made with Abraham, the one and only and beloved son. It is worth noting that facing such an outrageous

demand, a violation of God's own covenant, a contradiction of God's known character, Abraham was rather docile, compliant even—he did not bargain with God. Unlike previously when the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah were facing divine judgement and punishment, Abraham bargained hard, repeatedly, for God mercy. Yet, when facing the sacrifice of Isaac, Abraham did not even raise a peep.

That objection (or shall I call it 'a mild questioning') would come from Isaac himself in verse 7, as they were walking up to Mount Moriah, he said to his father Abraham, "Father!" And he said, "Here I am, my son." (the second 'Here I am' in this story). Isaac then inquired, "*The fire and the wood are here, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?*" An astute observation, where is the lamb for the burnt offering? To which Abraham replied, "*God himself will provide the lamb for a burnt offering, my son.*"

Was it simply a lie to pacify his son, or did Abraham actually believe in what he said, we do not know. Whether Isaac was truly satisfied with that answer, also we do not know. What we do know is from that point on, Isaac remained silent, compliant just as his father, as two of them walked on together.

When they reach the mountain top, to the place that God had shown them, Abraham built an altar made of wood. He bound his son Isaac and laid him on the wooden altar. Not a word was spoken between them. With tears in his eyes, and anguish in his heart, the father then reached out his hand and took the knife intending to complete that dreadful act, to kill the son. Just before the fatal blow struck, the angel of the Lord called out to him from heaven, "Abraham, Abraham!" And he replied, "Here I am" (most gleefully). The third, the final and the most crucial 'here I am' statement of the story.

Then God's messenger said, "*Do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him, for now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me.*" It was a test! It really is just a test! And Abraham looked up and saw a ram, caught in a thicket by its horns. He then went and took the ram and offered it up as a burnt offering instead of his son. So Abraham called that place, Yahweh Yir-eh, meaning '**The Lord will provide**', as it is said to this day, "On the mount of the Lord it shall be provided."

In Judaism, Mount Moriah is identified as Jerusalem, for in 2 Chronicle chapter 3, King Solomon was said to have built the temple of the Lord on Mount Moriah, though that identification is widely contested. More

importantly, the ‘binding of Isaac’ (or Akedah in Hebrew) is read, remembered, and celebrated during Rosh Hashanah, or the Jewish New Year. Though the story of that binding is somewhat troubling, nevertheless as part of the liturgy that is read on the second day, people ask God to “remember us for life”.

It is worth noting that New Testament writers have different, but not contradictory explanations to the faith of Abraham. The writer of Hebrews, in chapter 17, describes Abraham in believing that God is able to raise someone from the dead—and figuratively speaking, he did receive Isaac back. The writer of James, in chapter 2, describes the faith of Abraham as active in his works—that is the act of willing to sacrifice his son Isaac. In so doing, the Scripture is thus fulfilled that says, “Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness.”

The faith of Abraham took a lifetime to cultivate, it may start small, timid, and foolish, yet it grew and strengthened over time, as he journeyed alongside God. His trust that **the Lord will provide**, is perhaps rephrased most beautifully by Apostle Paul, in Romans 8:28-30, a promise that I hold near and dear, *“We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn within a large family. And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.”*

The obedience of Isaac in accepting the binding of his father, reminds us of the obedience of Christ on the cross. For two thousands years after Abraham, on the hill of Golgotha, also called Calvary, on top of mount Jerusalem, God provided his own son Jesus, as a sacrifice for the whole humanity. No angel of the Lord came to stop that offering, no ram could ever substitute Christ. It was not a test, for it was necessary for the redemption of humanity, of you and I. For that, we give thanks to the Lord, for God’s steadfast love endures forever.

**In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.**