

“I Bet Abraham Didn’t Tell Sarah”

Genesis 22: 1 – 19

Makemie Presbyterian Church

June 21, 2009 Father’s Day

Picnic & Worship Sturgis Park on the River

Genesis 22: 1 - 19

22After these things God tested Abraham. God said to him, “Abraham!”
And Abraham said, “Here I am.”

² God 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 that I shall show 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; he cut the wood for the burnt offering, and set out and went to the place in the distance that God had shown him. ⁴ On the third day Abraham looked up and saw the place far away. ⁵ Then Abraham said to his young men, “Stay here with the donkey; the boy and I will go over there; we will worship, and then we will come back to you.”

⁶ Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering and laid it on his son Isaac, and he himself carried the fire and the knife. So the two of them walked on together. ⁷ Isaac said to his father Abraham, “Father!”

And Abraham said, “Here I am, my son.”

Isaac asked, “The fire and the wood are here, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?”

⁸ Abraham said, “God himself will provide the lamb for a burnt offering, my son.”

So the two of them walked on together. ⁹ When they came to the place that God had shown him, Abraham built an altar there & laid the wood in order. He bound his son Isaac, and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood.

¹⁰ Then Abraham reached out his hand and took the knife to kill his son.

¹¹But the angel of the Lord called to him from heaven, and said, “Abraham, Abraham!”

And Abraham said, “Here I am.”

¹²God 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.”

¹³And Abraham looked up and saw a ram, caught in a thicket by its horns. Abraham went and took the ram and offered it up as a burnt offering instead of his son. ¹⁴So Abraham called that place “The Lord will provide”; as it is said to this day, “On the mount of the Lord it shall be provided.”

¹⁵The angel of the Lord called to Abraham a second time from heaven, ¹⁶and said, “By myself I have sworn, says the Lord: Because you have done this, and have not withheld your son, your only son, ¹⁷I will indeed bless you, and I will make your offspring as numerous as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore. And your offspring shall possess the gate of their enemies, ¹⁸and by your offspring shall all the nations of the earth gain blessing for themselves, because you have obeyed my voice.”

¹⁹So Abraham returned to his young men, and they arose and went together to Beer-sheba; and Abraham lived at Beer-sheba.

This ends the reading.

Well Happy Father's Day to you all.

This classic text that Ted just read; is the story of the sacrifice of Isaac, by his father, Abraham, found in the first book of the Bible, Genesis.

The story of Abraham begins with his calling at 75 years of age, to follow God into Canaan & Abraham agrees, remembering his own father & saying, "My father was a wandering Aramean."

Sarah his wife & Abraham wander in the middle east for generations waiting for the promise from God to have offspring like the stars of the sky, like the grains of sand on the seashore, until they are both near 100 years of age. Then three angels visit them telling this ancient couple, who could be celebrating their 85th wedding anniversary, that they will have a son. Now Sarah laughs at this, I think rightly so, and yet they have a precious son, named Isaac; the only child of Sarah, an old hen with just one chick; for nothing is impossible for God.

Then according to our text this morning, God tells Abraham to sacrifice the only son of his & Sarah's; to bind him, place him upon an altar of wood, slit his throat, and set fire to the wood to make Isaac a burnt offering acceptable to God.

Now here is my question for us this morning. It isn't in our text. But I bet that Abraham did not go in and tell Sarah, what his God given plans were. Uh, uh.

“Oh, honey, by the way, I'm taking your sweet boy & burning him up as a God sacrifice. “

I don't think Abraham told Sarah. I mean, it's not like when you say, “Don't tell your mother. Don't tell your father.” Jaxon, John & I were out to dinner the other night & we were in a booth, with Jaxon next to me & John sitting across from us. And I said, “When I was a girl, I hated to wear shoes. So, when my dad & I would be out somewhere, I would ask him to take my shoes off. Which he always did. But he would say, “Don't tell your mother.”

“Jaxon,” I asked all innocent like, “has Daddy ever said that to you?”

And he paused, a beat or two & said, “Never.”

Then looked at his Dad & they both smiled.

Our text this morning says that after God told Abraham what to do, he calls two servants, his son & they set out. Because you know, Sarah, would have said, “Say what?”

And I think there would have been dead silence from Abraham. I mean, how could he have responded?

Silence. (Like down here at the river.)

I bet you all have noticed how there a fewer & fewer oases of silence in our noisy world. Communication has higher value for us than contemplation. Information is in greater demand than reflection. There was a time when only doctors wore pagers & the only person who carried a telephone around with him was the president of the United States, in case of nuclear attack. Now we are all that important. We can be found anywhere at any time, by anyone who needs us. When a pager goes off in a roomful of people, a banner unfurls above the wearer's head: I am necessary. I am involved in something so urgent it can't wait.

Sometimes it's our own need to communicate that is urgent. But the need to communicate with Sarah for Abraham in this story, non-existent.

We are getting ready for our summer trip to the Grand Canyon & I saw this on the National Park website, a complaint lodged about the use of cellular phones in the wilderness area. It seems that a visitor's long awaited view of from the rim of the Grand Canyon was ruined for him when a fellow traveler whipped out his phone & began describing the view to his children,

who were apparently reluctant to be torn away from the television show they were watching at home.

It is more & more difficult to us to choose silence when communication is possible. So it is no wonder so many of us are ambivalent about silence. Silence may suggest tranquility & awe, but it may also mean malfunction & death. Now peace appeals to me, but not so much that I'm ready to rest in peace. Making a little noise is how we remind ourselves that we're alive, remembering the Creator who brought us into being with a word.

Yet our Jewish forbearers in faith, were called not to speak out , not to recite creeds "I believe" but instead to listen, "Hear, O Israel." And so Abraham finds himself with the focus on his ears, not the lips – on listening, not speaking.

But who really wants to hear the voice of God? Just ask Father Abraham who has his own encounter with that voice in the land of Moriah. He and God had been in conversation for a long time by then. God had moved him and Sarah from Haran to Hebron with a whole lot of stops in between. God had dickered with him over the fate of Sodom & had given him advice on the strife between the mothers of his children. God had

made promises to him & begun to deliver on them. Abraham & Sarah had a son, Isaac, whom they loved. He was the only fruit that had dropped from their old, intertwined trees. He was the first star in their sky, a sky God had promised to fill with their descendants. Isaac was precious to them.

Which is why it was such a shock for Abraham to hear God's familiar voice telling him to set Isaac on fire. The same voice that had said, "Your wife Sarah shall bear you a son, and you shall name him Isaac," now said, "Take your son Isaac, your only son, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah & offer him there as a burnt sacrifice on one of the mountains I will show you." And that was all God said.

There was no word from the Lord the next morning when Abraham rose to chop firewood in the dark, burying the ax in the grain again & again. God was silent as Abraham saddled his donkey & went to wake his servants & his child. God was silent as the small party set out & silent for the three days it took them to find the place.

When they got there, the only voice Abraham heard was his own. "Stay here with the donkey," he told his servants. "The boy & I will go over there; we will worship & then we will come back to you." It was a lie, but what was he to do? Let Isaac hear what God had said or protect the boy

from the knowledge of God? Abraham protected him, to the point of assuring his son when he asked that God would provide a lamb for the burnt offering.

But when they came to the place God had shown him, there was no lamb in sight. There was also no word from the Lord. The only sound was Abraham's loud breath as he squatted to lift the stones for the altar. Isaac too was silent as he watched his father work, first making a table out of the rocks, then laying the firewood, first this way; then he laid it that way, or at least that's what he seemed to be doing. What he really was doing was listening – listening so hard it made his head hurt & his chest ache, fooling around with the rocks & the wood until he could find no more reasons to stall. God was not going to speak. Abraham could protect his son, no longer.

He turned to the boy & I'm glad scripture spares us the details.

According to the text Ted read, there was no screaming, no struggle.

Abraham didn't have to chase his own son & tackle him. He didn't have to force the boy's skinny arms behind him & carry him shrieking toward the furnace. "He bound his son Isaac & laid him on the altar, on top of the wood." That's all it says. But you have to wonder, why it was so easy. Had

the boy fainted? Had his father knocked him out?

“Then Abraham reached out his hand & took his knife to kill his son.”

Never in the history of the world, I think, had there been such a silence. No one said a word. Not Abraham. Not Isaac. Not God. It was the knife’s turn to speak, until an angel cleared its throat & said, “Abraham,” it said, “Abraham!”

And Abraham said, “Here I am.” It was the word he had been waiting for. His son was spared. He had passed the test. But Abraham never talked to God again. In the years that were left to him he spoke about God often enough, but he never again spoke to God & God respected the silence. Their conversation was over. Abraham’s reward for obeying God’s voice was never to have to hear it again.

According to the Midrash, the encounter on Mount Moriah was so overwhelming that Isaac was blinded by it & Abraham became deaf, while Sarah died of grief. And if this is the price of direct contact with God is it any wonder that human beings pulled away? The resistance of the prophets is legendary. “O, Lord, please send someone else,” Moses said to the God of the burning bush. Isaiah’s excuse was that he was unclean, & Jeremiah’s that he was too young. Ezekiel kept his lips pressed together

until God shoved a scroll through them. Jonah resisted until a whale swallowed him.

So you can see, we are not excused from trying. As a preacher, I think I resemble a matchmaker in some ways. Turning one way, I carry the longings of the human heart to God. *Do you love us? Do you care?* Turning the other way, I bring back the answer.

The reason you do not know is that you have never been loved like this before. If you let me, I will dissolve your heart with love.

And if I speak too long, too overbearingly, or too factually, I will never help the lovers get together. My job is to choose the fewest, best words that will allow you to find one another & then get out of the way. Amen.