

"THE IMPOSSIBLE IMPASSABLE TEST!"

Genesis 22:1-14

What was your last test?

Students say math last Thursday. **OR...** Confirmands say the Apostles' Creed test in instruction class 10 days ago. **OR...** A patient says her biopsy test to check whether it's cancer or not. **OR...** A worker in the office says all those pent-up emotions/anger that just about spilled over into an all-out tongue lashing to your co-worker. **OR...** student drivers say waiting a week to take another behind-the-wheel test for a license because they failed the first one.

These are tests in life that seem insignificant, but for the person going through them, they are huge. They are like running a marathon, an almost impossible & impassable test.

The OT lesson for the 1st Sunday in Lent is a much greater test. This story of God calling Abraham to sacrifice his own son Isaac is a fascinating, suspenseful, and moving story unlike any other. Through it, God is teaching us not only about how he dealt with Abraham, but how He still deals with us today. God also sends us tests in life all the time – for two reasons:

- 1) ...to challenge our faith under trials
- 2) ...prove His promise to provide

So let's go to the region of Moriah and witness what I call:

"THE IMPOSSIBLE IMPASSABLE TEST!"**1**

How could Abraham do it? He was a proud father about 115-120 years old. He had a strong, vibrant, young son named Isaac born when he was 100 and his wife Sarah was 90. Isaac was the apple of his eye; **the heir apparent** of everything he owned, especially the promise that the Savior was to be born from his descendants.

But God didn't leave him alone and challenged Abraham's proud and peaceful contentment with an **impossible impassable test**: **TAKE YOUR SON, YOUR ONLY SON ISAAC, WHOM YOU LOVE AND GO TO THE REGION OF MORIAH. SACRIFICE HIM THERE AS A BURNT OFFERING ON ONE OF THE MOUNTAINS I WILL TELL YOU ABOUT.** Are you kidding me: **KILL MY SON?** Why was this necessary? Did God have to go to such extreme? Who would do such a thing to human being, let alone his only son?

God didn't explain His **WHY**. He didn't tell Abraham *'I'm just doing this to test you, so don't worry – Isaac will be just fine in the end.'* No, God simply asked Ab. for a kind of sacrifice He'd never asked for before. Even though God promised that from Isaac's line, the Savior would come – He's telling Ab. to cut the line. Talk about **a challenge of your faith** under the severest of trials. Ab. has every excuse **NOT** to obey this command. Unless his heart is as ice-cold as Lake Superior, nobody in their right mind would go through with this.

But what do we read? **EARLY THE NEXT MORNING**, Ab. got up and saddled his donkey. He took with him two of his servants and his son Isaac. **When he had cut enough wood for the burnt offering, he set out for the place God had told him about.** Before sunrise, Ab. and his crew set out for about a 50 mile hike that took 3 days. Every minute & every mile took him closer to the most **impossible impassable test** he could ever imagine.

Ab. had 3 days to change his mind. But he never flinched; his faith never wavered. His trust in the Lord was so solid that when he arrives at the place where God wants him, he tells his servants to stay behind because he and Isaac were **going to worship God and come back**. That doesn't sound like someone who doubts God. Ab. was so convinced of God's promise that he believed that if God wanted Isaac dead, He would raise him back because God promised the Savior through him. So Ab. put God first above all things, even his own son. This is the **First Commandment in neon lights**: **YOU SHALL HAVE NO OTHER GODS** meaning **WE SHOULD FEAR, LOVE, AND TRUST IN GOD ABOVE ALL THINGS**. God wanted Ab. to show that he loved him more than anyone or anything else. This test was for Ab. to prove that God was absolutely #1 in his heart, soul, and mind.

Remember when your little one scraped his knee or hurt his finger and came crying to you? How your heart went out to that Lil Guy to ease the pain! When Isaac asked about where was the lamb for the offering, that had to hit Ab hard. Put yourself in his shoes: **Dad? The fire and wood are here, but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?** How would you answer that? Ab simply answered: **GOD HIMSELF WILL PROVIDE THE LAMB FOR THE BURNT OFFERING, MY SON**. That's trust above all things – even his own flesh/blood!

We all face Ab's dilemma. You're not asked to sacrifice your child (at least not in America), but God still calls for sacrifice in our lives because He still wants us to show that we have no other gods beside him. God asks us to sacrifice what's precious to us, like our time, our talents, our treasures. **He commands us** to show that he is #1 in our lives by attending worship and communion

which is what **WORSHIP RENEWAL** has been stressing for a year. He commands us to show that he is #1 by making our offerings our very **first financial priority**. You have opportunity to commit what your support will be for our 2015-2016 ministry in your **plan for giving**. Maybe you're thinking: "*Well, I can't increase my offerings*" even though God says in Malachi: **Test me in this and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessings that you will not have room enough for it.** {Mal 3:10} We just don't test/trust God enough to do this.

Sometimes, like Ab, God chooses to send us special tests of faith we don't understand. He allows us to be challenged and tested in ways we don't expect– to strengthen our faith so our responses give God the glory. When the biopsy comes back **cancerous**, when the pink slip says **'this is your last day today'**, when your spouse walks out and says **'I want a divorce'**, when the emergency room doctor says: **"we did all we could"** – those are the **impossible, impassable tests** that challenge our faith.

Abraham puts us to shame. WE have failed our tests of faith. When God tests, we turn away. We complain that the commandments are too hard, too demanding, too outdated, too inconvenient. We still have those secret gods that we just can't let go off. Our thoughts, words, and actions do not reflect Christian trust, but stagger around with worry, hopelessness, and despair. All those tests God puts in our lives are to lead us to Him, not from Him. And instead we sin against Him and bring his judgment upon ourselves.

Without a trust in the Lord, everything in life is **an impossible, impassable test** because we are alone without his help. That's why this story is in Genesis – to challenge our faith and check how strong is it in the midst of our trials.

2

We'd all like to think that if God came to us with the same command as Ab., we'd all make the same choice, but I doubt it. Sacrifices are hard – **we don't give up that which we love**. But God did – and that **PROVES HIS PROMISE TO PROVIDE**.

As Ab. was about to do the unthinkable & plunge that knife into his son's body, the Lord Himself (in the person of an angel) stepped in. **DO NOT LAY A HAND ON THE BOY...NOW I KNOW THAT YOU FEAR GOD, BECAUSE YOU HAVE NOT WITHHELD FROM ME YOUR SON, YOUR ONLY SON**. It's not that as if God didn't know this Himself, but here He gave Ab. **this impossible, impassable test** and it was NOT impossible nor impassable. Ab. passed with flying colors. **NOW I KNOW THAT YOU FEAR GOD**, now I have let you show me that fear, love, and trust in me above all things.

Ab. looked up, and there was the substitute: a ram caught by its horns. He took that ram and sacrificed it instead of Isaac. That ram was God's way of proving His promise to provide. So Ab called that place **the LORD WILL PROVIDE**. God provided Ab with a substitute, someone to take the place of the one who was marked to die.

Connect the dots and you have Lent. We were marked to die for our sins. We had a death **sentence because we were sinful at birth, sinful from the time our mothers conceived us**. (Ps 51:5) But God provided a substitute in His Son. God who spared the life of Isaac **"did NOT spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all."** (Rom 8:32) God demanded a sacrifice and He had to provide it in His Son. Jesus went willingly into the desert to pass every test & temptation Satan could throw his way. He walked that treacherous path to Calvary with each step inching closer to the altar of the cross. When he was nailed on it, no angel came down at the last minute with orders to stop his crucifixion. Jesus endured all our hell, our punishment, our justice, our guilt & sin in our place – just as the ram endured death in Ab's place. **God proved His promise to provide** on Mt. Moriah and on Mt. Calvary! And you are forgiven of your sins as a result.

Everyone has a time of trials when it seems the rug is pulled out from under you, when life's plans change, when disaster strikes, when a **nearly impossible, impassable test** comes that **challenges our faith**. When all else fails, remember we still have what Ab. had – **a clear promise of God to provide**. Trust in Jesus love and you will prevail. Your faith will be strengthened; your life will be a blessing. And God will be glorified! **Rely on Him and you will pass the test! AMEN**

(Congregational response: Nicene Creed)