

The Covenant with Abraham

Sunday, February 28, 2021

"I swear by myself, declares the LORD, that because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, I will surely bless you and make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as the sand on the seashore."

Genesis 22:16-17

"God put Abraham to the test." The idea of God testing us can be jarring. It jumps out at you a little—what kind of loving God is that? Yet, all of us have turned to God at some point and asked, Why? Why is this happening to me? Why is this happening to someone I love? What do you want from me right now? What are you trying to tell me?

God's ask of Abraham is unthinkable. God asks for Abraham's only child, Isaac. Isaac, the only son of a long barren couple. Isaac, child of laughter and God's promise. Isaac, the child whose ancestry is destined to become a great nation. Why would God go back on that promise in such a heartbreaking way? The horror it brings to us and must have brought Abraham is enough for anyone to question their commitment to God. If this is the cost of God's covenant, is it worth it?

The odd truth that peaks out from the corners of this traumatic story is that God wants all of us. Everything. That which we love dearly, the wounds we hide, the struggles we hold. There is nothing in us or of us that God does not desire. And God withholds nothing from us. It is all there for us. In this covenant, we are invited to share the same kind of love that God pours out onto us. We must love with hands open to giving all that we have.

The love of one's child is not lost on God. In the Baptism of Jesus, we hear God's voice clearly stating, "This is my beloved Son." The message may have been less so for Jesus and more so for the watchers. In other words, "I love you all so much that I have given you my very self, as you are, in your humanity." God gives up the very thing asked of Abraham - God's own beloved Son. To be with us in our losses, in our tragedies, in our sufferings, and in our sacrifices. God sees and holds that which we give up, whether we are willing, reticent, or resistant.

The other part of the truth, though, is that God does not want to take away the gifts and the joys in our life. An angel saves Isaac, and a lamb is sacrificed instead. God's test for Abraham was to be open and willing, to trust fully and completely. It is the same test that faces each of us today. It is simple and yet simultaneously difficult. How far does our love and trust in God extend? Do we trust God with our path, with our families, with our deepest selves, or do we seek to control and protect, do we limit out of fear?

We can't always know where God is leading us. We can't see what's on the other end of the sacrifice or what will happen after the storm has passed. Our call is not to see but to open to God, to withhold nothing from God. In this, we may be able to see where we are being led. Indeed, we might see what we weren't looking for and come to a different understanding of the things we do not expect.

Brief daily reflections for the remainder of the week:

Monday, March 1, 2021

The idea of God testing us can be unsettling, but we have all asked, "Why?" at some point. Have you experienced God testing you in this Lenten season? How did you respond?

Tuesday, March 2, 2021

Isaac, the son of Abraham and Sarah, was especially longed for after Sarah is deemed barren. Anyone who has struggled with infertility and subsequently had a child knows well the deep longing and sheer awe after having lost hope. What are you deeply longing for? In your longing, how have you pinned your hope on God?

Wednesday, March 3, 2021

When push comes to shove, the difficult truth is that God asks Abraham to sacrifice that which he holds most dear because God desires our whole selves: even that which is difficult to share, that which might not be pretty, even that which we don't want to share. God desires us wholly. What are we withholding from God? How can we share with God even that which is difficult?



Reflection for the Second Week of Lent

Thursday, March 4, 2021

In the same way, God hopes for our whole selves; God offers God's own self in the gift of Jesus. Indeed, God sacrifices God's self in the gift of Jesus, also. How can you offer yourself in service as Jesus does this Lenten season?

Friday, March 5, 2021

How far does your love and trust of God extend? Like Abraham who is willing to offer his own flesh and blood in service of God, where are the places in your own life where you can deepen and extend your dependence on God?

Saturday, March 6, 2021

Abraham is prepared to lay down the life of Isaac, in the Paschal Mystery Jesus lays down his own life for others. What is God asking you to lay down this Lenten season?