

July 2, 2023 Rev. Larry Vilardo

Sermon: Love's Long Legacy Genesis 22:1-14

After these things God tested Abraham. He said to him, "Abraham!" And he said, "Here I am." **2** He 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. And the two of them walked on together. **7** Isaac said to his father Abraham, "Father!" And he said, "Here I am, my son." He said, "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." And the two of them walked on together.

9 When they came to the place that God had shown him, Abraham built an altar there and 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[a] his son. **11** But the angel of the Lord called to him from heaven and said, "Abraham, Abraham!" And he said, "Here I am." **12** He 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." **13** And 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. **14** So Abraham called that place "The Lord will provide,"[b] as it is said to this day, "On the mount of the Lord it shall be provided."

My step children were brought up in Hawaii. Now that they have their own children, they had a desire to show their children what growing up in Hawaii was like.

Three generations of our family headed to Oahu for a vacation and legacy tour. There our children showed our grandchildren where they went to school, attended church, played, and hiked. We visited their favorite beaches and bought shave ice from the place where two generations of our group jumped off a cliff into the ocean. Lorraine and I skipped that. It was wonderful for Lorraine and I to observe how much this passing of a legacy of love meant to the family.

All of us want a legacy of love and no one human has had one like Abraham.

The Christian, Islamic, and Jewish faiths are all, at root, children of Abraham. That means that he has 3.8 billion adherents or almost one half of the 8 billion people on earth.

In reading today's passage we would might think that no one who was sane or stable would sign on as a child of Abraham. In fact many of us would consider calling child protective services, and quickly. This is one of the darkest and deepest texts about sacrifice, redemption and hope in

all of scripture. Luther called it “The Dark Command”. Let’s walk with Abraham and Issac and God through the valley of the shadow. Our pilgrimage begins when the Lord calls Abraham. Abraham had answered the Lord’s voice many times but this was to be different. Or was it? The Lord says “Take your son, your only son, whom you love—Isaac—and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on a mountain I will show you.” What?

Notice, God knew Abraham loved Issac, and he called Issac Abraham’s only son even though Abraham had another son, Ishmael, who was the result of an affair with the maid. Issac was everything to Abraham. Issac was the future and hope of a legacy. *In a double irony Issac’s name means laughed or joy.*

Abraham was a rich man with many flocks and herds and a beautiful wife, Sara (who was not consulted here!). He was a great warrior having rescued Lot from the five Kingdoms marauders. But he only wanted one thing, a child to carry his legacy.

If Issac died, the future died, and Abraham would have no legacy. Yet Abraham headed up the mountain of Moriah, which means both “God has seen” and “God was seen”. Abraham headed up with Issac, the wood and two young adolescent servants.

There is a dramatic moment when he sees Mount Moriah in the distance. I am sure he wonders what does God sees. But he tells his two servants to hang back, for this is a truly tortured and lonely path. Abraham was very old so he had Issac carry the wood the rest of the way, and Issac says “The fire and wood are here, but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?” These are the last words spoken by Issac recorded in Scripture. Notice Abraham kept the dangerous items with himself, the very large warriors knife or cleaver, and the pot with embers in it.

Abraham answered, “God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son”. That sentence could be either tender or terrifying. And the two of them went on together. The narrative continues to describe that horrible moment. Abraham arranges the wood carefully, and slowly he binds Issac, twisting his limbs. The Hebrew verbs here begin to suffocate and dominate as nouns and adjectives drop out of the Hebrew text. The sentences become tight, confining, and stifling, forcing the reader to focus on this horrific event. Before Abraham could plunge the knife in an Angel appears and says, “Do not lay a hand on the boy, “Do not do anything to him”. Now I know that you fear God, because you have not withheld from me your son, your only son.” Then in a thicket Abraham sees a ram caught, which is the provision of God. And he calls the place God provides Jehovah Jirah. Jehovah Jirah is a play on the word Moriah. This is a strange passage. Theologians and scholars often stand dumbfounded as they gaze upon this horrific scene.

Yet it is echoed in popular culture. Think of Thanos who sacrificed his daughter for the Soul Stone in the Marvel blockbuster Infinity Wars. Since this is fourth of July weekend, perhaps I can give an illustration that might shed some light on this dark passage. There was a substitute choir director in our church in Rockville who was a Vietnam veteran, and he had earned a Silver Star. His patrol of nine men stumbled into a meeting of the Viet Cong and the North Vietnamese regulars. Within 15 seconds they had lost half their personnel. A firefight ensued. Dick was the Radio operator. Radios, unlike cell phones, are very large and heavy, but like cell phones they often have poor reception. Dick could not get through to radio for Naval guns and air support. He had to climb a large mountain with out cover with a very heavy radio. From there he had to

keep his cool and radio in positions. All the while taking fire. He said that he did it because as the radio operator this was his job. But what he did saved the lives of many of his squad. Later his grandson graduated from West point. That was his legacy.

It is dangerous to glorify war. Yet it is right to honor those who have faced that horrific human experience. We cannot glorify death and suffering, but we can honor those who have carried on.

It seems strange to glorify the torture and death of Jesus on a cross, but the church has always glorified our Lord for the love he showed in choosing to suffer for us. He has freed us through love to move forward in the most challenging of times. When we are in the valley of the shadow, God sees us. When we emerge we see the Lord clearly.

We can not glorify the tragedies of wars and suffering that have affected El Salvador, but we can honor those who challenged those travesties over the decades with Santa Cruz El Salvador including George and Elizabeth, Charlie and Gwen, Chuck and Nancy and so many more.

We cannot glorify hatred for people of color or immigrants. We can and must honor those who stand by them. We can honor the memory of those founding members of Trinity who were the first to allow and conduct a bi-racial marriage in Santa Cruz county. We can honor the leaders at Trinity who not so many decades ago ordained an openly Gay Deacon. And we can honor the leadership that voted to list Trinity as a sanctuary church.

You cannot glorify homelessness, but you can honor those who at their own peril, like Ellen and Debbie and others kept the showers maintained and our shelter open during the darkest days of the pandemic.

All of us here at Trinity are heirs to those legacies of love, and all of those decisions would seem insane to many. Not so, for we are of sound mind because our minds are captive to the word of God here at Trinity Presbyterian. Now that is an honorable legacy of love. And I am honored to be a part of it.