

Abraham said to Isaac, "I'm going to upgrade this old computer of mine from Windows 97 to Windows 10." Isaac was aghast. "Father," he said, "that's impossible! Your computer is just too slow; it won't be able to handle Windows 10!" But with absolute confidence and faith, Abraham said to his son, "God will provide the RAM."

Abraham was a very smart man. He knew a Lot.

This morning we're going to talk about Abraham's relationship with the Lord and what this might have to do with our walk with God and with one another.

OPENING PRAYER

GENESIS 22:1-14

God tested Abraham. He said to him, "Abraham!" "Here I am," he replied. ² Then God said, "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." ³ Early the next morning Abraham got up and loaded 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. ⁴ *On the third day Abraham looked up and saw the place in the distance.* ⁵ *He said to his servants, "Stay here with the donkey while I and the boy go over there. We will worship and then we will come back to you."* ⁶ Abraham took the wood for the burnt offering and placed it on his son Isaac, and he himself carried the fire and the knife. As the two of them went on together, ⁷ Isaac spoke up and said to his father Abraham, "Father?" "Yes, my son?" Abraham replied. "The fire and wood are here," Isaac said, "but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?" ⁸ Abraham answered, "God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son." And the two of them went on together. ⁹ *When they reached the place God had told him about, Abraham built an altar there and arranged the wood on it. He bound his son Isaac and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood.* ¹⁰ *Then he reached out his hand and took the knife to slay his son.* ¹¹ *But the angel of the LORD called out to him from heaven, "Abraham! Abraham!" "Here I am," he replied.* ¹² *"Do not lay a hand on the boy," he said. "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."* ¹³ *Abraham looked up and there in a thicket he saw a ram caught by its horns. He went over and took the ram and sacrificed it as a burnt offering instead of his son.* ¹⁴ *So Abraham called that place The LORD Will Provide [Jehovah-jireh]. And to this day it is said, "On the mountain of the LORD it will be provided."*

Genesis is 50 chapters long, and Abraham's story consumes 15 of those chapters, almost a third of it. But Abraham's life was so diverse, so rich, you could probably write 1500 chapters and still not tell his story completely. Nonetheless, we have what we need to understand what it meant for him to walk by faith.

If you know Abraham's story, you know it's not about a man who didn't have his ups and downs. It's a real story about a real man, a man who was loved by God. It all began very smoothly. God made a promise to Abraham that he would make his descendants into a great nation and that he would bless the whole world through him (12:1-3). The first step, however, was that Abraham needed to leave his home country and start all over in another land. No problem. Abraham did as God commanded him, and they got off to a great start.

But it wasn't long before the Lord tested Abraham's faith. There was a famine in the land, and so Abraham and his wife, Sarah, went to Egypt for relief. That was good. But when Pharaoh saw how beautiful Sarah was and wanted to make her his wife, Abraham's faith faltered. He told Sarah, **"(tell Pharaoh) that you are my sister so that it may go well with me" (12:13)**. That was bad. And the Lord had to step in and threaten Pharaoh with his life if he touched Sarah.

And then there was the test of faith concerning Hagar, Abraham's 16-year old Egyptian servant girl. Abraham was 85 and Sarah was 75 years old, and they still hadn't had a baby. But God had promised descendants, and so, taking matters into their own hands, like you do, Sarah said, Why don't you make a baby with Hagar? And Abraham, after about 11-seconds of prayerful consideration, said, "Why not?!" I paraphrase, but you get the idea.

And God was forced to intercede again, informing Abraham that his plans were not his own, and that he'd created a not-so-holy mess. Nonetheless, the Lord kept his promise and he blessed Abraham. As we know, Sarah finally delivered, literally, a son for Abraham. His name was Isaac.

Sometimes Abraham got it right, such as when he interceded for Lot, his nephew, just before God rained hellfire and brimstone down on Sodom and Gomorrah, and when he built altars to God all around the countryside as an outward sign of his faith, and when he obeyed God's command to circumcise his people.

But sometimes he got it wrong. Walking by faith is not easy. Ever since Adam and Eve, people have wrestled with listening to God versus listening to their own hearts.

Late in Abraham's life, God gave him the same test he'd given him much earlier, putting him in the same situation as he had experienced with Pharaoh and Sarah. This time it was with a king. And, again, Abraham gave his wife up as his sister! A complete fail!

When a teacher finishes teaching her class, what does she do? She gives the students a test. If the whole class fails the test, how does she react? Does she give up? No. She teaches the students again, and then she tests them again.

God never gave up on Abraham. Each time he failed a test, the Lord taught him again, and then he tested him again.

And this brings us to the story of God's command to sacrifice Isaac, our Old Testament lesson this morning. If this was the only story about how God tested Abraham's faith, we would not be lifted up by it, for it would only include the victory. Instead, God gave us the failures with the victories that we might understand how faith is not easy, that to live by faith includes the internal struggle of our will against God's will, a struggle not unlike Abraham's.

I'm thankful for that. I don't need a story about a person for whom walking with God was easy. Because my walk has not always been easy, I need someone like Abraham who had his ups and downs and yet prevailed.

God said to Abraham, **"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" (v.2).**

Let's try to put ourselves in Abraham's sandals: He was more than 120 years old, and Isaac was 20-something. In his retirement, Abraham had taken great joy watching his boy grow into a man. Surely, he imagined Isaac and Rebecca, his wife, raising their family, experiencing all the benefits of God's covenant. So now imagine his horror and confusion when God told him to sacrifice his son! He must've asked questions like, "Is this God's voice or is it the devil's? Am I losing

my mind? Have I or Isaac committed some grave sin, and the Lord has decided to withdraw his promise and cancel his covenant with me?"

Luther said that Abraham's story was preserved by God for our edification, that we would understand how severe the Lord's tests of faith can be.

In this case, Abraham did not fail. He recognized the voice that commanded him to sacrifice his son as the same voice he had been listening to for almost 50 years. And he obeyed.

But let's not put Abraham on a pedestal just yet. He still had his doubts. He didn't tell anyone what God had told him to do. He left Sarah in the dark, as well as Isaac and the men who accompanied them to the holy mountain. It's one thing to believe God, but it's something else altogether to have the strength to tell others what you believe God is telling you to do.

God told Abraham to take Isaac to the "**region of Moriah**," which was a range of mountains, or hills, really. The name, "Moriah," means "fear." Abraham was probably filled with fear! But for the believer, the fear of God is translated into respect for and faith in the Lord.

As Abraham and Isaac drew near to the hills of Moriah, God directed them to a specific location. There after that place would be called Mt. Moriah.

God's work is always dynamic; he creates signposts all along the way to help future generations recognize his gracious hand at work. Later, a city would be built on Mt. Moriah by the Canaanites, which they would call Salem, which means "peace." One thousand years later, that city would be conquered by King David. He would rename it "the city of peace" or Jerusalem.

What signposts is God putting up around our church? How do we see his hand molding and shaping our little community, making a difference in our neighborhood? I do not doubt that his fingerprints are on the lives of every single person who has the opportunity to hear the proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ on this campus. During the Toy Drive, at our Celebration with Children events, through the Food Distribution program, in our preschool, during worship

and in Bible study, the Lord is present fulfilling promises he made a long time ago to Abraham to bring forth a blessing in this world, in our world.

We read that with God's command, **"Abraham got up and loaded 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. On the third day Abraham looked up and saw the place in the distance" (vv.3-4).**

Finally, Abraham had no questions, no arguments, no excuses, but he simply obeyed God. But it was a 3-day journey! It must've been horrific! If Abraham had only been 3-hours away from his destination, he wouldn't have had time to think about it. But over those 3-days, his grief must've been intense. The devil would've been firing darts at him the entire time, and his own doubts would've begun to nibble away at his faith again.

I wonder how he made it. What was his secret weapon? From where did he summon his courage, fortitude, and wisdom? Abraham's secret weapon was really no secret at all: He had God's Word—God had spoken, and he believed. It's that simple. God said "Go!" And Abraham said, "—" (silence). Abraham said nothing. And that's the point.

If you've got God's Word, what more is there to say? What will we add to it to make it better? Nothing. Abraham's faith was stronger at this moment in time than it had ever been before, and the only thing he had to stop doing was trying to out-think God. Always good advice.

As they drew near to the place for the sacrifice, Isaac asked his dad, **"where is the lamb for the burnt offering?"** **And Abraham answered, "God himself will provide the lamb" (vv.7-8).**

You know that sense of dread and frustration you experience when you have to make a hard decision, that rock or hard place kind of decision? But when you finally make your decision, you feel a sense of resolve, a kind of peace, as in you're committed to do what needs to be done, and you know it's the right thing to do, even though you don't like doing it? I think that's where Abraham was. He knew he had heard God's voice, and he had decided to obey it voice without

delay, without any sideshow. And he knew peace. And he spoke a simple but prophetic word to his son. Indeed, he spoke the Word of God. He said, **“God himself will provide the lamb.”**

If one can watch what’s happening on Earth from heaven, imagine Abraham’s delight when two thousand years later he watched John the Baptism cry out from the River Jordan when he saw Jesus, **“Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!” (John 1:29)**

Signposts.

Our reading only took us this far, but the story continues. We read that Abraham tied Isaac down to the altar. If only I could’ve been a fly on that altar! How did this happen? There’s nothing about a physical struggle between Isaac, who was a strapping young man, and Abraham, who was older than dirt. Jedi-mind-trick? Vulcan-mind-meld? I think it’s simpler than that: Somewhere along the way Abraham told Isaac what the Lord had told him, and Isaac also believed. He believed in a God who could make a man from clay in the earth and breathe life into him, and he believed this same God could raise the dead.

After Isaac was braced for his own sacrifice on the altar, we read, Abraham **“reached out his hand and took the knife to slay his son. ¹¹But the angel of the LORD called out to him from heaven, “Abraham! Abraham!” “Here I am,” he replied. ¹²“Do not lay a hand on the boy,” he said. “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.” ¹³Abraham looked up and there in a thicket he saw a ram caught by its horns. He went over and took the ram and sacrificed it as a burnt offering instead of his son. ¹⁴So Abraham called that place The LORD Will Provide [Jehovah-jireh]. And to this day it is said, “On the mountain of the LORD it will be provided.””**

Luther points out that if Abraham had lost faith at any point in this act, he would not have heard God’s voice, and Isaac would’ve been dead. Or if God had been asleep, Isaac would’ve been dead.

But God does not sleep, and Abraham was as attentive as ever to his Lord’s Word.

St. Paul wrote to the believers in Rome, **“I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, *which is your spiritual service of worship.* ²And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect” (Romans 12:2-3).**

We are Abraham. We are Isaac. The Lord has received our sacrifice, and he has raised us up from the dead by grace through faith in the name of Jesus who died for our sins and rose from the grave on the third day, ushering us into eternal life. This is the Word of God.

If our faith rested on anything besides this Word, Luther said it would be a fictitious faith and sheer arrogance before the Lord Almighty. But in this Word, our faith moves mountains, it hears the voice of God, and it transforms a community wracked by sin into a community of saints.

Abraham named the spot where he built the altar to sacrifice Isaac, **“The Lord Will Provide.”** In Hebrew that’s **“Jehovah-jireh.”**

“Jehovah-jireh”: Please say it with me: (**“Jehovah-jireh”**). **“The Lord Will Provide”**: Please say it with me: (**“The Lord Will Provide.”**)

Brothers and sisters in Christ, may you be encouraged in your walk with God, knowing that he will provide everything you need for this life unto the next. **“Jehovah-jireh.”**

May you be encouraged in your hearts, knowing that when you fall, the Lord forgives you and blesses you as his son, his daughter, and that he will never forsake you.

And may you have the opportunity to share this Good News with another person who really needs to hear it, in the name of Jesus. Amen.