

Pastor Kenneth Mars

Christ the King & Immanuel Lutheran Churches – Cody & Powell, WY

Lent V – Midweek

March 20, 2024

Text: Genesis 22:1–14

Grace be to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

The history of Abraham, Sarah, and Isaac is one of the most joyful and troubling portions of the Bible. The Lord God called Abram, so he was called at first, to leave behind everything he knew in his own country, his family and society, and his false gods. The Lord promised Abram, “I will make of you a great nation...and in you all the nations of the earth shall be blessed (Gen. 12:1–3). The Lord led him to the land of Canaan. After a couple of decades went by, Abraham and Sarah remained childless. Eventually, the Lord visits Abraham and Sarah through an angel announcing that Sarah will give birth to a son in nine months. Both Abraham and Sarah laughed when they heard that Sarah would give birth to a son. She was 90 years old and Abraham 100! Sarah eventually gave birth to Isaac. His name means “he laughs”, a fitting name to be sure.

The Bible calls Isaac, the son of promise. Even as all Christians are called “children of promise” (Galatians 4:23, 28). Isaac’s birth was a miracle; 90-plus year-old women don’t get pregnant. Every Christian is a miracle for we are supernaturally born by the ministry of the Holy Spirit working through Christ’s Gospel. We are all Isaacs. Children of promise.

But now the troubling side of Abraham and Isaac’s history. Genesis 22 records Abraham’s trial of faith. The Lord God called out to Abraham, “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 of which I shall tell you” (vs. 2). Can you feel the power behind those words, “your only son...whom you love”? Isaac was the son of promise and laughter. Now the son of anguish and trial. Not because of anything Isaac did. But because of

God Himself. The very gift that God had given, He is now taking away. It looks as if God was going back on His promise.

It's arguable that the test of Abraham and the trial of the Canaanite woman in the Gospels of Matthew and Mark are the most difficult in all of Scripture. In both cases, the trial arises from God Himself. God commanded Abraham to sacrifice Isaac. The Lord Jesus was silent and dismissive of the Canaan woman's request to heal her daughter of demon oppression. And yet, here is where we must set our eyes of faith. God proves to be true and faithful under the very appearance of hostility and adversity.

We Christians living in the prosperity of 21st century America need to be reminded that God's good and gracious will is often experienced with many bitter trials. Trials that God Himself brings upon us. Abraham didn't ask for this test. The Canaan woman sought God's grace in Christ not His severity. But the Biblical saints knew God's grace often came under the form of trial, judgment, and suffering. Listen to these Bible passages which illustrate that God works through both judgment and grace in our lives.

Deuteronomy 32:39

³⁹“See now that I, even I, am he, and there is no god beside me; I kill and I make alive; I wound and I heal; and there is none that can deliver out of my hand.

Hosea 6:1

¹“Come, let us return to the LORD; for he has torn us, that he may heal us; he has struck us down, and he will bind us up.

Psalms 60:1–5

¹O God, you have rejected us, broken our defenses; you have been angry; oh, restore us. ²You have made the land to quake; you have torn it open; repair its breaches, for it totters. ³You have made your people see hard things... ⁴You have set up a banner for those who fear you ... may be delivered, give salvation by your right hand and answer us!

God works in and through trial and testing, breaking and healing, even death and resurrection to refine us. We are not to seek out trials and testing. God works this when and where He wills. We pray in the Lord's Prayer, "Thy will be done." The Bible reminds us that God accomplishes His will for the salvation of His people and the glory of His name. At times, His will is joyous and easy. Other times, it is hard. St. Augustine described God's work in his life as a "severe mercy."

The apostle Paul wrote how God used the adversities of his life to bring him into a greater and more joyous knowledge of Christ Jesus. At one point in his missionary work, Paul had been arrested unjustly for preaching about Jesus. He had broken no law. But he suffered for his faith and faithfulness to Jesus. Listen to these words he wrote to the Philippian Christians while in jail (Philippians 3:7–11):

⁷But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. ⁸Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ...¹⁰that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, ¹¹that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.

Paul shared in Christ's sufferings so that He could also participate in Christ's resurrection. The Holy Spirit gives God's people faith to trust and believe in Him even when it means bitter suffering. Throughout Lent, we sing as a prayer the hymn "On My Heart Imprint Your Image". We mustn't forget it's the image of the crucified and resurrected Jesus. Even when it looks like God has abandoned us, He is, in fact, upholding us with His love, drawing us ever closer to Himself.

Abraham went to Mount Moriah to sacrifice his son, Isaac. But at the fateful moment, the Lord stayed Abraham's hand, "Do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him, for now I know that you fear God, seeing you have not

withheld your son, your only son, from me” (Gen. 22:12). God provided a ram to be the sacrifice so that Isaac might live. And through his posterity, the Lord Jesus was born to be the Savior, God’s blessing to the world.

And it’s here that we must recall the singular event that gives meaning to all suffering, to all of God’s works and ways in the world. It’s the suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus. What Isaac was in prophetic foreshadowing, the Lord Jesus fulfills in redemptive substance. Jesus is the beloved, only begotten Son of promise.

And yet, the Father gave His one and only begotten Son, whom He loved in perfection, over to suffering and death that the world might be redeemed. There would be no substitutionary sacrifice to save Jesus from death. He Himself is the sacrifice, given by the Father in love to save Abraham, the Canaanite woman, you, me and all believers in Christ; His death was our death, His suffering our suffering, His resurrection from the dead our resurrection. Hebrews 9:14 reminds us that Jesus offered His own blood to His heavenly Father through the eternal Spirit in order to “purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God.” God purifies our conscience through the death and resurrection of Jesus. It’s not always easy. But it is always good. God the Father brings us through the trials and joys of life in this world. The adversities we face in this world are preparing us for greater and deeper joy in this world and the world to come. For in Christ, we are His beloved children of joy and promise.

✠ In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. ✠ Amen.

Now the peace of God which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus unto life everlasting. Amen.