

Sermon for Morning Prayer Good Friday

Lessons:

The First Lesson: Here beginneth the twentysecond Chapter of the First Book of Moses, Called Genesis.

“And it came to pass after these things, that God did tempt Abraham, and said unto him, Abraham: and he said, Behold, here I am. And he said, Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of.

“And Abraham rose up early in the morning, and saddled his ass, and took two of his young men with him, and Isaac his son, and clave the wood for the burnt offering, and rose up, and went unto the place of which God had told him. Then on the third day Abraham lifted up his eyes, and saw the place afar off. And Abraham said unto his young men, Abide ye here with the ass; and I and the lad will go yonder and worship, and come again to you. And Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering, and laid it upon Isaac his son; and he took the fire in his hand, and a knife; and they went both of them together. And Isaac spake unto Abraham his father, and said, My father: and he said, Here am I, my son. And he said, Behold the fire and the wood: but where is the lamb for a burnt offering? And Abraham said, My son, God will provide himself a lamb for a burnt offering: so they went both of them together. And they came to the place which God had told him of; and Abraham built an altar there, and laid the wood in order, and bound Isaac his son, and laid him on the altar upon the wood. And Abraham stretched forth his hand, and took the knife to slay his son. And the angel of the Lord called unto him out of heaven, and said, Abraham, Abraham: and he said, Here am I. And he said, Lay not thine hand upon the lad, neither do thou any thing unto him: for now I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son from me. And Abraham lifted up his eyes, and looked, and behold behind him a ram caught in a thicket by his horns: and Abraham went and took the ram, and offered him up for a burnt offering in the stead of his son. And Abraham called the name of that place Jehovahjireh [**Jee-hoe-vah-JEE-rah**]: as it is said to this day, In the mount of the Lord it shall be seen.

“And the angel of the Lord called unto Abraham out of heaven the second time, And said, By myself have I sworn, saith the Lord, for because thou hast done this thing, and hast not withheld thy son, thine only son: That in blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heaven, and as the sand which is upon the sea shore; and thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies; And in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; because thou hast obeyed my voice.”

Here endeth the First Lesson.

The Second Lesson: Here beginneth the eighteenth Chapter of the Gospel According to St. John.

“When Jesus had spoken these words, he went forth with his disciples over the brook Cedron [**KEY-drahn**], where was a garden, into the which he entered, and his disciples. And Judas also, which betrayed him, knew the place: for Jesus oftentimes resorted thither with his disciples. Judas then, having received a band of men and officers from the chief priests and Pharisees, cometh thither with lanterns and torches and weapons. Jesus therefore, knowing all things that should come upon him, went forth, and said unto them, Whom seek ye? They answered him, Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus saith unto them, I am he. And Judas also, which betrayed him, stood with them. As soon then as he had said unto them, I am he, they went backward, and fell to the ground. Then asked he them again, Whom seek ye? And they said, Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus answered, I have told you that I am he: if therefore ye seek me, let these go their way: That the saying might be fulfilled, which he spake, Of them which thou gavest me have I lost none. Then Simon Peter having a sword drew it, and smote the high priest’s servant, and cut off his right ear. The servant’s name was Malchus [**MOLL-kooss**]. Then said Jesus unto Peter, Put up thy sword into the sheath: the cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it? Then the band and the captain and officers of the Jews took Jesus, and bound him, And led him away to Annas [**ANN-uss**] first; for he was father in law to Caiaphas [**KYE-ah-fuss**], which was the high priest that same year. Now Caiaphas [**KYE-ah-fuss**] was he, which gave counsel to the Jews, that it was expedient that one man should die for the people.

“And Simon Peter followed Jesus, and so did another disciple: that disciple was known unto the high priest, and went in with Jesus into the palace of the high priest.

But Peter stood at the door without. Then went out that other disciple, which was known unto the high priest, and spake unto her that kept the door, and brought in Peter. Then saith the damsel that kept the door unto Peter, Art not thou also one of this man's disciples? He saith, I am not. And the servants and officers stood there, who had made a fire of coals; for it was cold: and they warmed themselves: and Peter stood with them, and warmed himself.

“The high priest then asked Jesus of his disciples, and of his doctrine. Jesus answered him, I spake openly to the world; I ever taught in the synagogue, and in the temple, whither the Jews always resort; and in secret have I said nothing. Why askest thou me? ask them which heard me, what I have said unto them: behold, they know what I said. And when he had thus spoken, one of the officers which stood by struck Jesus with the palm of his hand, saying, Answerest thou the high priest so? Jesus answered him, If I have spoken evil, bear witness of the evil: but if well, why smitest thou me? Now Annas [ANN-uss] had sent him bound unto Caiaphas [KYE-ah-fuss] the high priest. And Simon Peter stood and warmed himself. They said therefore unto him, Art not thou also one of his disciples? He denied it, and said, I am not. One of the servants of the high priest, being his kinsman whose ear Peter cut off, saith, Did not I see thee in the garden with him? Peter then denied again: and immediately the cock crew.

“Then led they Jesus from Caiaphas [KYE-ah-fuss] unto the hall of judgment: and it was early; and they themselves went not into the judgment hall, lest they should be defiled; but that they might eat the passover. Pilate then went out unto them, and said, What accusation bring ye against this man? They answered and said unto him, If he were not a malefactor, we would not have delivered him up unto thee. Then said Pilate unto them, Take ye him, and judge him according to your law. The Jews therefore said unto him, It is not lawful for us to put any man to death:

That the saying of Jesus might be fulfilled, which he spake, signifying what death he should die. Then Pilate entered into the judgment hall again, and called Jesus, and said unto him, Art thou the King of the Jews? Jesus answered him, Sayest thou this thing of thyself, or did others tell it thee of me?

Pilate answered, Am I a Jew? Thine own nation and the chief priests have delivered thee unto me: what hast thou done? Jesus answered, My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews: but now is my kingdom not from hence. Pilate

therefore said unto him, Art thou a king then? Jesus answered, Thou sayest that I am a king. To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth. Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice. Pilate saith unto him, What is truth? And when he had said this, he went out again unto the Jews, and saith unto them, I find in him no fault at all. But ye have a custom, that I should release unto you one at the passover: will ye therefore that I release unto you the King of the Jews? Then cried they all again, saying, Not this man, but Barabbas. Now Barabbas was a robber.”

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

Text:

From the First Lesson: “By myself have I sworn, saith the Lord, for because thou hast done this thing, and hast not withheld thy son, thine only son: That in blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heaven, and as the sand which is upon the sea shore; and thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies; And in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed....” In the Name of the Father, and of the † Son, and of the Holy Ghost. *Amen.*

Development:

In today’s First Lesson from Genesis, God tests Abraham’s faith and trust by demanding from him the most radical, the most complete sacrifice that any human being can be asked to make. While it is a serious matter for someone to sacrifice himself or herself for another or for others, many have done so and more would, under the proper circumstances, do so as well.

It is entirely probable that at least one of you listening to this sermon here today, if not more than one, has faced the risk of death in the service of others, whether as a parent pushing a child from in front of a motor vehicle, a member of the safety forces answering a threatening call, or a member of the military in combat or combat support. Self-sacrifice, or the risk of self-sacrifice, is an important matter, not to be undertaken lightly, but it is not really all that uncommon. Abraham, on the other hand, was asked to show his faith in God by making a sacrifice that most of us could not even contemplate making: to give up a child. Most of us would willingly die to save a child but cannot conceive of making a child die for us.

One biblical commentator pointed out that first God called Abraham to cut himself off from his entire past, by moving from his home in Haran [**Hah-RON**] to the foreign land of Canaan [**KEH-nah-on**]. Then, in the incident recounted in today's First Lesson, God called Abraham to give up his whole future as well, by sacrificing his only son. "The testing goes to the heart of [Abraham's] life, his hope for meaning, and his trust in Yahweh [**YAH-weh**]; he is asked to give up the child of his old age, on whose life the fulfillment of God's promise depends."

Abraham passed God's test of his faith, by showing his willingness to obey God's command despite all the overwhelming human reluctance we know he must have felt, and God rewarded him richly for that faith. Not only did God not take away Abraham's future, He guaranteed that future to him.

Note here especially that God provided a suitable sacrificial victim in the form of the ram caught in the bushes, so Abraham could fulfill his promise to God without frustrating God's purpose of establishing a great people, as would have happened had Abraham killed Isaac.

Now God's testing of Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his son Isaac on Mount Moriah is a *type* of God's own sacrifice of His only Son Jesus Christ, which is the subject of St. John's account in today's Second Lesson. In this case, as in Abraham's, God provides a suitable sacrificial victim only, unlike Isaac and Abraham's ram, that victim does not serve to spare the Son from death. Instead, unlike Abraham, God actually went all the way and allowed His Son to be put to death.

In this, there is an interesting inversion, or at least lack of parallelism, between the *type*, which is Abraham's preparation for sacrificing Isaac, and the *antitype*, which is God's actual sacrifice of Jesus. Abraham's son was spared because, had he died, Abraham's family would have had no future here on Earth. God's Son was not spared because, had He lived, the whole family of mankind would have had no future in Heaven.

God provided Abraham with a mere farm animal, the ram, to be sacrificed, because all that had to be overcome was Abraham's own reluctance to obey God. For that, a mere farm animal sufficed. But God provided us with His Son to be sacrificed, because what had to be overcome was the Fall of Man, for which nothing less than God Himself could suffice. Where at the time of Creation God had given

mankind dominion over the animals, we could not redeem ourselves by sacrificing a creature like Abraham's ram that God had made less than, or subordinate to, us.

The faith that was required of Abraham was simply that he believe God would bring good out of the apparent evil of his killing of Isaac, and for this God had a "track record" with Abraham. Abraham knew that God had already given him the new, lush land he had been promised and had already given him the promised child, Isaac, whose birth could only have occurred through divine intervention.

Conclusion:

What was thus demanded of Abraham was great enough but the Faith that is required of us is even more. We are called to accept and believe that an innocent man, who was also God, willingly gave himself up for us and that a loving God the Father willingly provided His Son to be the sacrifice for us. Just as Abraham had the evidence of God's prior fulfillment of His promises to Abraham, so, too, we have the evidence of what God has done and given for us. In the face of that evidence, it is an ungrateful person indeed who refuses to believe that God will do what God has promised for him and for us.

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1 Psalms and Lessons for the Christian Year (1943), THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER x (PECUSA 1928, rev. 1943).

2 Genesis 22:1-18 (KJV).

3 Cf.: "So Abraham called that place The LORD will provide; as it is said to this day, 'On the mount of the LORD it shall be provided.'" Genesis 22:14 (RSV).

4 St. John 18:1-40 (KJV).

5 Genesis 22:16-18 (KJV).

6 John H. Marks, Genesis, in CHARLES M. LAYMON, ED., THE INTERPRETER'S ONE-VOLUME COMMENTARY ON THE BIBLE 18 (Nashville: Abingdon Press 1971).

7 Ibid.

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