

**SERMON FOR MORNING PRAYER**  
**The Seventh Sunday after Trinity**

**The Rev'd Warren E. Shaw, Rector**

**Lessons:**<sup>1</sup>

**The First Lesson:** Here beginneth the twenty-second Chapter of the First Book of Moses, called Genesis.<sup>2</sup>

“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 [**MORE-eye-uh**]; 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 [dgih-HOE-vuh DGEER-uh]: 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 sixth Chapter of the Epistle of Blessed Paul the Apostle to the Hebrews.<sup>3</sup>

“Therefore leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection; not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works, and of faith toward God, Of the doctrine of baptisms, and of laying on of hands, and of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment. And this will we do, if God permit. For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, And have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come, If they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame. For the earth which drinketh in the rain that cometh oft upon it, and bringeth forth herbs meet for them by whom it is dressed, receiveth blessing from God: But that which beareth thorns and briers is rejected, and is nigh unto cursing; whose end is to be burned. But, beloved, we are persuaded better things of you, and things that accompany salvation, though we thus speak. For God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labour of love, which ye have shewed toward his name, in that ye have ministered to the saints, and do minister. And we desire that every one of you do shew the same diligence to the full assurance of hope unto the end: That ye be not slothful, but followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises. For when God made promise to Abraham, because he could swear by no greater, he sware by himself,

Saying, Surely blessing I will bless thee, and multiplying I will multiply thee. And so, after he had patiently endured, he obtained the promise. For men verily swear by the greater: and an oath for confirmation is to them an end of all strife. Wherein God, willing more abundantly to shew unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, confirmed it by an oath: That by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us: Which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and stedfast, and which entereth into that within the veil; Whither the forerunner is for us entered, even Jesus, made an high priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec.”

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

### **Homily:**

Most preachers try to avoid preaching on the Old Testament lesson for today because it is not only emotionally challenging, it is theologically challenging as well. If a preacher does take on the challenge, the sermon is likely to morph into a theological lecture, and that’s not what most congregations want to hear.

Well, I’m not most preachers and you’re not most congregations, so I’m going to see what I can do with this difficult passage.

The religion of the Bible did not develop in a vacuum. It developed against a background of other religions in the Middle East that pre-date not only Moses but Abraham as well. Some of the practices of those ancient religions were rejected by the Jews, but others were incorporated, in modified form perhaps, into Jewish law and customs. One of those ancient, pre-Mosaic practices is the offering of the first-born son as a sacrifice to the god or gods.

Sounds brutal, doesn’t it? Sounds barbaric. But the killing of the first-born was actually carried out by some of Israel’s neighbors, and at one time even by some of the Jews themselves. The staying of Abraham’s hand is a dramatic condemnation of the practice, and the provision by God of a ram as a substitute

sacrifice is an endorsement of the idea of sacrificing a representative animal instead.

That provision is also a prefiguring of the sacrifice of Christ as a representative of the whole human race. You will recall that St. Paul calls Christ “the first-born of all creation” and John calls Him “the lamb of God”

A lamb would not have horns to be caught in a thorn bush, so it was necessary for the Abraham story that the substitute be a ram. But I can’t help thinking that that particular ram was once a lamb destined beforehand to be sacrificed in place of Isaac. In the book of Revelation, Jesus is called “the lamb slain from the foundation of the world.” I would also note that Jesus wore a crown of thorns to His death.

There are other foreshadowings in the Abraham story that are impossible to miss. Isaac, the only-begotten son and bearer of God’s promise of blessing to all people, carries on his back the wood on which he is to be bound and killed. So Jesus carried the Cross on which He was to be killed.

Abraham says to Isaac, “God will provide the sacrifice himself.” And so He did, not only in the Abraham story but even more so in the New Testament. God sent His own beloved Son to be sacrificed for us all. And just as Isaac was rescued from death and restored to his Father, so was Jesus on Easter.

The death and Resurrection of Jesus is an enactment in history of the eternal sacrifice and glorification of the eternal Son of God. That drama is prefigured in the story of Abraham’s readiness to offer up his only-begotten son.

But in order to make this sermon something more than a theological treatise, I return to the ancient practice of offering God not only the first-fruits of your loins but also of your cattle and your farm and your labor.

The basic idea is that it is God who has created all things and he therefore has a claim on all things. But God is willing to settle for only a part of what is His due. The kosher law recognizes that. It requires the killing of an animal in a

certain way so that the blood, which represents the life, is not consumed. It is poured into the ground, reserved, as it were, for the God who gave it. The rest of the animal may be eaten.

The same idea lies behind another ancient practice--the tithe, which also predates the Jewish law although it was written into it later.

Abraham met a priest by the name of Melchisedek, who is mentioned in the Epistle to the Hebrews as a prototype of Christ, the great high priest. It is more than coincidence that Melchisedek gives bread and wine to Abraham, and Abraham willingly gives Melchisedek 10% of all his wealth.

It all comes down to the belief that God has a claim on everything we have, but is willing to settle for only a small part of what He is owed. God is willing to let you keep 90% of what he has placed in your hands. You can think of that 90% as a very generous management fee. But God's 10% has to come off the top. He doesn't want whatever is left after you have spent what you want for yourself.

Abraham believed that. He acknowledged that God had a claim upon Isaac and was ready to offer God His due. He was also ready to pay his tithe to Melchisedek, the prototype of Christ.

You and I like to think of ourselves as spiritual descendants of Abraham, and so we should. But are we really? We lay claim to his heritage, and so we should. But if we are going to do that, we need to start thinking as Abraham thought and acting in faith as Abraham acted.

So now, as God's priest and Christ's representative, ordained after the order of Melchisedek, I am ready to receive your offering.

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St. David's Anglican Catholic Church  
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<sup>1</sup> *Psalms and Lessons for the Church Year* (1943), THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER xxviii (PECUSA 1928, rev. 1943).

<sup>2</sup> Genesis 22:1-18 (KJV).

<sup>3</sup> Hebrews 6:1-20 (KJV).