

God will Make a Way – on the Binding of Isaac
September 14, 2025

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All Saints ABQ

Grace and peace to you in God who is our Father and our Mother,
and in our lord and savior Jesus Christ



Our reading through the story of scripture takes a big leap
between last week and this one.

Last week, we read the story of God's creation of the world,
and the proclamation that it was all very good.

But as Genesis continues, things started to go wrong almost immediately.

Humans decided we would rather be like God than be creatures of God.

Adam and Eve ate the forbidden apple.

People built a tower to reach to the heavens.

Cain killed his brother Abel in a jealous rage.

Instead of living with God according to God's plan,

humans tried again and again to take control,

and their human plans were filled with selfishness, greed and violence.

Finally, God had enough.

God decided to destroy the whole thing and start over.

But then God saw that there was one family – Noah and his family –

who continued to follow God's ways.

So God told Noah to build an ark – in the middle of the desert.

It was crazy, but Noah did it.

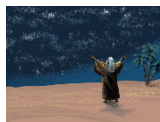
And Noah, with his family and his ark, survived the flood God sent to
purge the earth.

They carried with them a kernel of creation,

so that the earth could begin again.

And God promised never again to destroy the earth in such a way,

placing a rainbow in the sky as a sign of God's promise.



Time passed, the earth filled,

and God decided to try something new.

God once again found one man, one family,

and decided to bless and redeem the earth through them.

So God spoke to Abraham, and told him to leave his home, to bring his family and household and herds to the new place God would choose.

And Abraham did.

And God promised that Abraham and Sarah would have a son,
and that their descendants would fill the earth,
and that through them all the people of the earth would be blessed.

So Abraham and Sarah waited. And waited. And hoped. And prayed.

And finally Abraham decided to take matters into his own hands,
and he conceived a child with Sarah's maid, Hagar.

But that was not God's plan.

And finally, in their old age, past all reasonable hope of bearing a child –
Sarah had a son, and they named him Isaac.

Then the story skips forward a number of years.

Sarah becomes jealous of Hagar and Ishmael,
and convinces Abraham to exile them into the wilderness.

God shows up for Hagar in the wilderness, and makes her a promise
about the descendants of her son – but that's another story.

Finally, we come to the place where our story begins.

Abraham, Sarah and Isaac.

They've followed, they've waited, they've been blessed.



And then, these devastating words.

*After these things God tested Abraham. God said to him,
“Abraham!”*

And Abraham said, “Here I am.”

God 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.”

This is a hard story, which has challenged believers for centuries.

How could God do such a cruel thing to Abraham?

How could Abraham do such a cruel thing to Isaac?

In the terms of the larger story, there is another challenge.

Without Isaac, God's promise to Abraham is broken.

Without Isaac, God's plan to use Abraham's descendants to bless the earth is finished.

Without Isaac, God's whole relationship with the people of the earth is threatened.



And in the meantime, there is Abraham, silently obeying.

Where is the Abraham who once argued with God over the fate of Sodom and Gomorrah?

If there are 50 righteous people there, God will you spare it?

If there are 20 righteous people, is that enough to spare it?

Why doesn't Abraham argue as passionately for his own son?

One commentator I read this week suggested that, having seen Abraham's example, it is for us – the reader, the faithful believers – to lift up those questions on Abraham's behalf.

And we do.

What kind of God would set such a test?

It's a disturbing story filled with threat of violence and trauma.

One reading of the story that I find fascinating and helpful is to notice that the only one who is said to learn something in the story is God.

We are so used to our idea of an all-knowing, all-powerful God, that this is hard for us to understand.

But the all-knowing God – the unmoved mover – is a Greek idea, not a Hebrew one.

In the Hebrew Scripture, God learns.

God changes God's mind.

God is in honest relationship with God's people, which includes God hoping and longing for the faithfulness that even God cannot take for granted.

So here we have God, who has put all the eggs in one basket, so to speak – God's whole plan depends on this man, and frankly, Abraham's record is good but not perfect.

So God has to know.

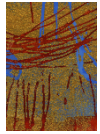
Can I count on this one?

Can I count on this family to be the family who will carry the blessing?

And God learns.

Yes, Abraham is willing to walk right into hell,
trusting God to fulfill the promise
and make the way when there seems no way out.

(point out crucifixion in Chagall painting)



And it is at that point that perhaps we find the real kernel of this story.
Professor Ellen Davis writes that, if anyone had asked her,
she would have taken this story out of the Bible.

I mean, really, right here near the very beginning –
who wants to follow this God after reading this story?

Then she says,

I imagine making my argument to the heavenly Council on Divinely Inspired Works, and after they had listened politely, they would tell me that I had completely missed the point. The point of this story is not to make people want to believe in Abraham's God – who is of course also Jesus's God and Father. Rather, this harrowing story exists to help people who already believe make sense of their most difficult experience, when God seems to take back everything they have ever received at God's hand. The point is to help people who are already in stay in, stay in relationship with the one true God, even when their world turns upside down.

And friends, after a week like this one, in the midst of a year like this one,
isn't that what we need.

Some way to continue believing that God is God
and God has got this whole mess in God's hands,
that God is working somewhere in the chaos that surrounds us;
because otherwise, we're lost.

Professor Davis continues,

The story of Abraham and God and Isaac is the place you go when you are out beyond anything you thought could or would happen, beyond anything you imagined God would ever ask of you, when the most sensible thing to do might be to deny that God exists at all, or deny that God cares at all, or deny that God has any power at all. That would be

sensible, except you can't do it, because you are so deep in relationship with God that to deny all that would be to deny your own heart and soul and mind.

And so we say, with Abraham – God will provide the lamb.

I see no way through this, let alone a way out –

but God will provide the way.

Sometimes when we see no good options,

the only option is to keep walking the road laid out before us.

The road of trust.

The road of just putting one foot in front of the other,

even when it feels like we're walking through hell,

because we know God will not leave us there.

God will walk with us every step of the way.

And God will provide – the lamb, the way out, the grace, the healing

God will provide – the prayer, the community, the love, the wisdom.

This dreadful story meets us at the dreadful moments of our lives

and remind us that even in our darkest days,

in moments of fear and anxiety,

when we have reached the end of our power to cope –

we can trust God to make a way.

Thanks be to God

Amen.