

Can we acknowledge up front how difficult this text is? It is perhaps especially difficult because of our place in life right now, where we are constantly discussing risk and sacrifice. When I began mapping out this series in the Spring, I know that I was intentional in the selections of stories so that we would have a solid foundation & understanding on our spiritual Fathers & Mothers in faith. We cannot study Isaac without learning this story – not so much because of his role in this but what it teaches us about God and what is required of us. It is a hard story. When I prepared the Bible study that goes with this reading I invited readers to read this passage 3 different times. In reading the story several times we are able to move through the difficult pieces and see more to the story. If you are having a hard time with this passage, I invite you to pause the sermon and read it a couple of times.

God is testing Abraham. I don't know about you but I'm not a big fan of tests. As a student I especially did not like multiple choice tests because I was (and still am) so much better at explaining than selecting. Give me an essay exam and I always felt better. If only this test of Abraham was an opportunity for Abraham to give the right answer. But that was not what God was searching for in his chosen. God wanted, no God needed, someone who was true in their faith and obedience to God. I can't help but wonder how we would measure up in this task?

God is not asking for blind obedience from Abraham. God & Abraham had a relationship – one where God had made and kept promises. Abraham knew that God promised a life with more descendants than they could count. Abraham had not always trusted what God had promised. He and Sarah struggled because their experience taught them that this promise seemed too good to be true. God needed to know if Abraham had grown. Did Abraham trust that God's love for him, and for Isaac, was greater than anything he's known? Was Abraham willing to risk his second son after having given up his first? It was one year ago

that we handed our youngest to a surgical team to repair, again, his heart. There are no words for the fear and wonder of what may be. And even though we had done it before it was not easy. We can hardly imagine how Abraham was feeling knowing that he had already given up Ishmael. And yet. Abraham was faithful.

It is important to note that God is not just testing Abraham to test him or because God can. God did not know what Abraham would do because God had given humanity free will. God needed to know if Abraham was all in. And while this sacrifice seems extreme, Abraham was calm. When asked he knew that God would provide.

What sacrifices are we asked to do? In living out God's commandments to love God with all of our heart, our mind our soul and our strength as well as to love our neighbor as ourselves, we are asked to give up a lot. We are asked to give up our will so that God's may be done. We are asked to give up our comfort so that others may know God through us. We are asked to take up the cross of suffering and shame. Sacrifice is not for it's own sake. Sacrifice is not to show that we can do it. Sacrifice is not simply about endurance. Sacrifice is to demonstrate where our true allegiance can be found.

God, in testing Abraham, was made vulnerable. What if Abraham had not obeyed? What if Abraham ran away? How could God have fulfilled the promise if Abraham was not faithful? God's promise was on the line. We know that God would have found another way, as we see time and time again in later stories, but God risked first. We know that God does not cause bad things to happen to good people. And we know that God does not cause bad things to happen to bad people either. But God works through us. How can we act as God's hands and feet in the world?

Many of the ways that we would normally show our servanthood, are not available to us in this time. Does that mean

that God is not present and working in and through us?

Absolutely not. Our willingness to put other's health ahead of our own comfort is something that we can do to show God's love for us. Our willingness to sacrifice our desire to have things go back to normal, for a time, allows others to live. This is something that we can do. Now more than ever we are called to put our actions into practice. Are we willing to show God how much we love and trust? Can we follow after Abraham's example that in doing difficult things that God can and will provide? In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.