

We continue with our nine week series on the book of Genesis. Last week we read about the origins of creation; that in the beginning...is just that, a beginning. Before there was a beginning, there was, and is and will be God. We also talked about the fact that we have been created in the image of God, and about what that means for us as God's beloved children, and how we ought to relate to one another. Finally, we talked about the doctrine of the trinity, and discovered that how we understand the trinity, has an influence on how we engage each other. This week we turn our attention to one of the most difficult stories in scripture. The testing of Abraham has caused many theologians, pastors, philosophers, and Christians, a great deal of confusion. The question often raised, is how in the world could God ask Abraham to kill his own son? In order to answer this question we must go back a few chapters. (Read from Gen. 18 and 21) Now that we have some context, let's look at our reading from this morning again. In verse 2, God tells Abraham to take that thing which God had promised, and given to Abraham: his only son, Isaac, and take him up to the mountains and sacrifice him as a burnt offering. In the ancient world, child sacrifice was quite common. Many of the religions of that time required the sacrifice of their first born to the gods. Sacrifices were made, to appease the wrath of the gods, and so that the people could have the gods' blessing, to help them when they were in trouble. However, as far as scholars can tell, child sacrifice does not appear to have been a custom for the Jewish people, and it is never advocated for in the Old Testament. Animal sacrifices were in fact made in the Old Testament: to atone for the peoples sins. So it is not surprising that God is asking for some kind of sacrifice from Abraham, but the fact that God asks for *Isaac* is what is troubling. There are so many different elements of this story that are hard for our modern minds to grasp. The first thing that comes to mind for me is: how did Abraham get his son tied up? I mean, how did Isaac willingly allow that to happen? Wasn't he just a little curious about why his old man was tying him up? On the surface it looks like Isaac is a glutton for pain. It also looks like God is sick and twisted. And we aren't led to believe that Abraham will be receiving any father of the year awards. But remember what I read for you; The birth of Isaac was a miracle. He was a gift from God, to Abraham and Sarah. There was nothing about Abraham and Sarah that made them worthy of God's gift. Sarah was WAY to old to be having kids. Sarah getting pregnant smacks in the face of logic, and biology for that matter. But isn't that they way of God? There is a concept throughout scripture that states that with people, things are limited, but with God, there is no limit. Anything is possible. Remember what we talked about last week. God is not confined to time or the material world, because of who and what God is. God does not play in the same realms that we do. Whereas we are restricted to the confines of this world, God is not. Has anything ever happened to you, or to someone who you know, that defies all reason? Have you ever had a blessing, and you realized you had nothing to do with its occurrence? If we take what we talked about last week --that God is the author and finisher of all things for all eternity --then any thing we have, is a gift, and we have done nothing to deserve it. It is not a gift if we "earned it." So, when God asks Abraham to sacrifice his gift, Abraham realizes that Isaac is not really his anyways. When we give of ourselves, our time, our energy and our finances, to God and the church, we do so not out of obligation, but rather out of gratitude for what God has done for us, and for all that he has given us. When we give to God and the church, we are simply giving back to God what is His. This is not easy. If it were, it would not be a "sacrifice." Although we don't see it, I am sure Abraham was upset, torn, and stressed out about what God was asking Him to do. Could you imagine having to be Abraham, and going home to tell Sarah what God had asked him to do? When we give back to God, no matter what it is, it is a sacrifice. But when we remember that all that we have comes from God, sacrificial giving

becomes a joy and not a chore, a blessing and not drudgery. God asking someone to sacrifice their son should not sound unfamiliar. God was not asking Abraham to do something that He wasn't going to do himself. Jesus Christ, the ONLY son of the father, came down from heaven, and was born a human through the most blessed virgin Mary. Jesus lived, walked, talked, and existed like all of us, except His Dad was a little more impressive than any of ours. But God, in His love and mercy, sacrificed His only son, that we might be partakers of the divine nature. That we who were condemned to death because of sin, might once again have life. You and I deserve death because of our sin nature, but, the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the willingness of His Father to sacrifice Him for us, grants us a new life. Whatever God asks of us, it's never beyond the realm of something He hasn't already done. God loves us, and cares for us, so much, that He gave up His Son. I don't want to stop there however. Throughout the Old Testament we read that God abhors human sacrifice. So once again, why would God instruct Abraham to do such a thing? Because He was testing Abraham. God wanted to know if Abraham would be obedient to God, even unto sacrifice. God also knew, that He would not let Abraham go through with it, but wanted to see if he would. Do you ever feel like God might be testing you and your faith? I know I have. But we must always remember, God will never give us more than we can handle. That being said, we must not forget that there is evil in the world, and we must not mistake evil for God's testing. We need to discern. Is what we are going through from God? Or is it a manifestation of sin and evil in the world? Abraham knew the voice of God from previous encounters, so he was aware that it was God telling him what to do. We have the same ability. When we have experienced God in the past, whether in interactions with other people, through the reading of God's Holy Word, through prayer, or receiving the Holy Eucharist, we have something to look to for guidance. God knew all along that He was going to provide a ram, to take the place of Isaac. Just like God provided another sacrificial lamb on our behalf, Jesus Christ to take our place. It is this concept and premise, that our Church is founded on. We prayed this in our collect this morning, and we affirm it every time we say the creeds. Finally, what this story shows us, is that no matter our situation, God will provide. There are going to be times when you feel like God has left you alone, and that you have to do something that goes against human understanding. But just remember, you are not alone, and God will always provide for his children that are faithful followers. Even in those times, when God asks of us something that we don't understand, we must rely on His Holy Spirit and know that He will never leave us, nor forsake us. Amen.