

1<sup>st</sup> Sunday in Lent  
February 18, 2024  
Lincoln Heights Lutheran Church  
Genesis 22:1-18

### **Rethinking Trials, Tests, and Temptations**

#### **Genesis 22:1-18 (EHV)**

*Some time later God tested Abraham. He called to him, "Abraham!" Abraham answered, "I am here." <sup>2</sup>God said, "Now take your son, your only son, whom you love, Isaac, and go to the land of Moriah. Offer him there as a whole burnt offering on one of the mountains, the one to which I direct you." <sup>3</sup>Abraham got up early in the morning, saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him, along with Isaac his son. Abraham split the wood for the burnt offering. Then he set out to go to the place that God had told him about. <sup>4</sup>On the third day Abraham looked up and saw the place in the distance.*

*<sup>5</sup>Abraham said to his young men, "Stay here with the donkey. The boy and I will go on over there. We will worship, and then we will come back to you." <sup>6</sup>Abraham took the wood for the burnt offering and loaded it on Isaac his son. He took the firepot and the knife in his hand. The two of them went on together. <sup>7</sup>Isaac spoke to Abraham his father and said, "My father?" He said, "I am here, my son." He said, "Here are the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?" <sup>8</sup>Abraham said, "God himself will provide the lamb for a burnt offering, my son." So the two of them went on together. <sup>9</sup>They came to the place that God had told him about. Abraham built the altar there. He arranged the wood, tied up Isaac his son, and laid him on the altar on top of the wood. <sup>10</sup>Abraham stretched out his hand and took the knife to slaughter his son.*

*<sup>11</sup>The Angel of the Lord called to him from heaven, "Abraham, Abraham!" Abraham said, "I am here." <sup>12</sup>He said, "Do not lay your hand on the boy. Do not do anything to him. For now I know that you fear God, because you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me." <sup>13</sup>Abraham looked around and saw that there was a ram behind him, caught in the thicket by its horns. Abraham went and took the ram and offered it up as a burnt offering instead of his son.*

*<sup>14</sup>Abraham called the name of that place "The Lord Will Provide." So it is said to this day, "On the mountain of the Lord it will be provided."*

*<sup>15</sup>The Angel of the Lord called to Abraham a second time from heaven <sup>16</sup>and said, "I have sworn by myself, declares the Lord, because you have done this thing and have not withheld your son, your only son, <sup>17</sup>I will bless you greatly, and I will multiply your descendants greatly, like the stars of the sky and like the sand on the seashore. Your descendants will take possession of the city gates of their enemies. <sup>18</sup>In your seed all the nations of the earth will be blessed, because you have obeyed my voice."*

Dear Friends in Christ,

When my children were infants, we were encouraged to give them some tummy time each day. Now, it seems that infants are more comfortable on their backs. But when you flip them onto their tummy, they struggle. They can't see what they want and have to struggle to turn their little heads. They struggle to lift their heads up and push up with their little arms. They get frustrated and might begin to whimper and cry. Why would a parent intentionally put their helpless infant in an uncomfortable situation? Because it is good for them. It builds muscle strength, helps develop vision, and prevents a flat spot from developing on the back of their heads from lying on their back all the time. From the infant's perspective, it is torture. From the parents' perspective, it is good.

During the Sundays of Lent, we are "Rethinking Religion." The world has lots of opinions and

thoughts about religion. As people born with a sinful nature, we also have many opinions about religion. But what does the Triune God say about religion? What does Jesus Christ say about these matters? Too often we are looking at religious topics through infant eyes. We only see the struggle, the pain, the confusion. We don't understand why a loving God would allow such things in our lives. Therefore, it is good for us to rethink religion to align our thoughts with God's thoughts. Today we rethink trials, tests, and temptations by considering the account of the almost sacrifice of Isaac in Genesis 22.

*Some time later God tested Abraham. He called to him, "Abraham!" Abraham answered, "I am here." <sup>2</sup>God said, "Now take your son, your only son, whom you love, Isaac, and go to the land of Moriah. Offer him there as a whole burnt offering on one of the mountains, the one to which I direct you." <sup>3</sup>Abraham got up early in the morning, saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him, along with Isaac his son. Abraham split the wood for the burnt offering. Then he set out to go to the place that God had told him about. <sup>4</sup>On the third day Abraham looked up and saw the place in the distance.*

We know this is a test directly from God because God had Moses write it down for us in Genesis. We don't have direct revelation about the tests, trials and temptations we face today. Is it a test from God for my good? Is it a trial that I'm facing due to living in a world under the curse of sin? Is it a temptation from the devil himself, attempting to separate me from my Savior? It probably doesn't matter how we categorize these because the same struggle could be all three.

Someone gives you back too much change at the store. You notice as you are walking to the car. It is a test to see if you will do what is good for your neighbor and return the extra change, so the cashier is not reprimanded when her cash drawer is short at the end of the shift. It is a trial because going back into the store is going to make you late for the next thing in your day. It is a temptation toward greed and revenge because those greedy stores already charge too much, and I deserve to cheat them once in a while.

Abraham's test was a bit more serious than discovering you received extra change. He is to sacrifice his son. God had promised Abraham and Sarah a son and after a quarter of a century, Isaac was born. Abraham had waited so long, and this was his only son with Sarah. He loved Isaac. How could he now sacrifice Isaac? The type of sacrifice God required was a whole burnt offering. The whole animal was burned on the altar to show total dedication to God. How could Abraham do this to his son, his only son, whom he loved? This is a big test.

In the past, Abraham had passed some tests and failed others. God told him to move to a new land. Abraham left his homeland and went to the place God told him to go. He passed. But when Abraham was in Egypt, he told the king that Sarah was his sister and held back the fact that she was his wife. He failed to trust the Lord. God promised that Abraham and Sarah would have a son, but both got impatient. Abraham takes Sarah's servant Hagar as another wife to have a son with her. He failed the test. Abraham again failed to mention to another king that Sarah was his wife. Another fail on a test for Abraham.

The results of Abraham's tests were a mixed bag, some good scores and some not so good scores. When our faith in God's promises is tested, the results are about the same as Abraham's. We hold back the whole truth because we don't trust God to take care of us if we tell the whole truth. We humans make up our own rules about marriage and children instead of trusting that God's plan for marriage and children is best. We trust God's promise to give us eternal life in heaven, but we get impatient and upset with God when we encounter trials and struggles now. The tests keep coming. Will we listen to the Lord and trust his Word or improvise?

Our test results are sometimes good and sometimes bad. On the other hand, the Lord's test results are a bit boring. He always keeps his promises. Abraham listens to God and moves to a new land

and God blesses him as he promised. Abraham sins and God blesses him as he promised. Abraham is impatient and God keeps his promise for Sarah to have a son. God does not waver in keeping his promises and he was going to make sure a descendant of Isaac was born to bless all nations.

All the tests Abraham went through strengthened his trust in all of God's promises. That is how he is able to speak some amazing words on the way up the mountain with his son, his only son, the son whom he loved. As he left the servants at the base of the mountain, Abraham said, "*Stay here with the donkey. The boy and I will go on over there. We will worship, and then we will come back to you.*" Abraham was planning to end his son's life on the mountain but also trusted that both of them would come back down the mountain. God promised that the Savior would be a descendant of Isaac. Therefore, Isaac must live to be married and have children of his own. Abraham's thoughts are recorded in Hebrews 11: "He reasoned that God also had the ability to raise [Isaac] from the dead, and in a figurative sense, Abraham did receive him back from the dead." (Hebrews 11:19). This is not an infant faith. This is a faith that has been tested and strengthened over decades, a faith in all of God's promises, a faith that nothing is impossible with God.

The Lord tested and strengthened Abraham's faith so that when Isaac asked where the lamb was for the sacrifice, Abraham could reply: "*God himself will provide the lamb for a burnt offering, my son.*" Abraham did not know how it would happen, but God did provide a ram to be sacrificed instead of Isaac. Jesus is the descendant of Isaac who would bless all nations. Jesus is the descendant of Isaac who is also the Lamb of God sacrificed in the place of all sinners. God kept his promise to Abraham, to Isaac and to all people.

And our loving Father in heaven wants to keep us in this one, true faith. When we are tested in life and in faith, rethink that natural reaction. For we naturally think tests and trials are bad. We naturally think these unpleasant times in life are harmful and to be avoided. Rethink testing so that we can even thank the Lord for the tests we've gone through and are going through. This is really difficult to do but we can always trust that God has our good in mind in all things. He will use whatever we are going through to strengthen us for whatever comes next.

The soldier who is never tested in training will not be ready for the battle. The athlete who is not tested during practice will not perform well in competition. The baby who never has tummy time will be slow to develop muscles that need to be strengthened. The Christian whom the Lord never tests may not be ready for what God knows we will face in life. Thanks be to the Lord for loving us enough to send his Son, his only Son, the Son whom he loves as the sacrifice instead of us. Thanks be to the Lord for loving us enough to test us and strengthen our trust in every one of his promises. "The Lord will provide."

Amen.