# Congregational-Presbyterian Church

 **“Faith Put to the Test”**

**Genesis 22:1-14**

 **August 21, 2022**

In our walk with Abraham this summer, we have learned about trials he faced along the way. As with Abraham, we have faced trials in our lives that seemed understandable. Perhaps, having disobeyed God, we have had to face the consequences of our sin, and we can see the reason for experiencing these difficulties. But harder are the questions that arise when pressures and circumstances take place for no apparent good reason. Such was the case for Abraham when God asked him, for no apparent good reason, to sacrifice his son Isaac. I invite you to turn with me to Genesis 22:1-14

Some time later, God tested Abraham’s faith. “Abraham!” God called. “Yes,” he replied. “Here I am.” “Take your son, your only son—yes, Isaac, whom you love so much—and go to the land of Moriah. Go and sacrifice him as a burnt offering on one of the mountains, which I will show you.” The next morning Abraham got up early. He saddled his donkey and took two of his servants with him, along with his son, Isaac. Then he chopped wood for a fire for a burnt offering and set out for the place God had told him about. On the third day of their journey, Abraham looked up and saw the place in the distance. “Stay here with the donkey,” Abraham told the servants. “The boy and I will travel a little farther. We will worship there, and then we will come right back.” So Abraham placed the wood for the burnt offering on Isaac’s shoulders, while he himself carried the fire and the knife. As the two of them walked on together, Isaac turned to Abraham and said, “Father?” “Yes, my son?” Abraham replied. “We have the fire and the wood,” the boy said, “but where is the sheep for the burnt offering?” “God will provide a sheep for the burnt offering, my son,” Abraham answered. And they both walked on together. When they arrived at the place where God had told him to go, Abraham built an altar and arranged the wood on it. Then he tied his son, Isaac, and laid him on the altar on top of the wood. And Abraham picked up the knife to kill his son as a sacrifice. At that moment the angel of the Lord called to him from heaven, “Abraham! Abraham!” “Yes,” Abraham replied. “Here I am!” “Don’t lay a hand on the boy!” the angel said. “Do not hurt him in any way, for now I know that you truly fear God. You have not withheld from me even your son, your only son.” Then Abraham looked up and saw a ram caught by its horns in a thicket. So he took the ram and sacrificed it as a burnt offering in place of his son. Abraham named the place Yahweh-Yireh (which means “the Lord will provide”). To this day, people still use that name as a proverb: “On the mountain of the Lord it will be provided.”

Those who are familiar with the Bible know that this is one among many tests of faith that God presents to his people in the Bible. For example, if we turn forward to Exodus 14 we find Moses and the Hebrew people who have fled slavery in Egypt facing a great test of faith. Will God take care of them in the face of the approaching war chariots of the Egyptian army? The people failed the test - Exodus 14:10-12

As Pharaoh approached, the people of Israel looked up and panicked when they saw the Egyptians overtaking them. They cried out to the Lord, and they said to Moses, “Why did you bring us out here to die in the wilderness? Weren’t there enough graves for us in Egypt? What have you done to us? Why did you make us leave Egypt? Didn’t we tell you this would happen while we were still in Egypt? We said, ‘Leave us alone! Let us be slaves to the Egyptians. It’s better to be a slave in Egypt than a corpse in the wilderness!’”

But Moses, seeing exactly the same thing that they were seeing, replied with great faith in verse 13: “Don’t be afraid. Just stand still and watch the Lord rescue you today. The Egyptians you see today will never be seen again.” And he stretched out his staff over the waters of the Red Sea, and God parted the waters so that the Hebrews could safely cross to the other side. And, when the Egyptian army tried to follow, the Lord caused the waters to come back together and they were drowned. When God brings the test, will we respond with fear or with faith?

 In Joshua chapter 6, Moses has died and Joshua is now God’s appointed leader of the Hebrew people as they enter the Promised Land. There they face the mighty and seemingly unconquerable city of Jericho. Here’s the test. God tells them to march around the city once a day for six days, and then six times on the seventh day, all the while not uttering a sound. Then, on the seventh time around the city on the seventh day, they are to make as much noise as possible – the people are to shout, the priests are to blow the trumpets, the drummers are to beat their drums as loudly as they can – and God will deliver the city into their hands. “You want us to do what?” “Are you kidding me?” “We’ll look like complete fools.” And on that seventh time marching around the city on the seventh day, I’m sure not all the people shouted. I imagine there were some who held back, who allowed unbelief to cause them to keep their mouth shut. But God is not constrained by our doubt. The walls did come down, as he had promised, and I am certain that the people who had not believed, when they saw God’s mighty work, wished they had had faith.

 One more example, this one from the book of Judges chapters 6 and 7. The Midianite army was marching on Israel, an army so vast that it couldn’t be numbered by the Israelite scouts. God tells Gideon that God will defeat the Midianites, and that Gideon is to lead the Israelite army of 32,000 men against the uncountable enemy. “What can I do with only 32,000 men?” Gideon asks of the Lord. “Absolutely nothing,” God responds. “Tell those who are afraid that they can go home.” And 22,000 men went home, having failed the test of faith because of their fear. God then takes the 10,000 still remaining and reduces them to 300, and with 300 God does what could not be accomplished with 32,000.

 We could go on, spending many hours reviewing the biblical tests of faith in both the Old and the New Testaments. But, let’s return to the test that God designed for Abraham. Verse 2: “Take your son, your only son—yes, Isaac, whom you love so much—and go to the land of Moriah. Go and sacrifice him as a burnt offering on one of the mountains, which I will show you.” The test of faith always involves a sacrifice of some kind - something important to us, something we’d like to hold on to, something perhaps even precious to us, that God asks us to give up. God knows exactly what he’s asking of Abraham – “your son, your only son . . . whom you love so much.” This command from God is a dagger through Abraham’s heart. There is great cost involved.

 What is Abraham’s response? The next morning he gets up early, saddles his donkey, gets two servants and his son Isaac, and begins the three day journey to the place God has told him. Abraham has plenty of time on that journey to think through what God has asked of him. Imagine it as a set of scales in Abraham’s mind, like those used in the past to weigh merchandise. On the one pan are such things as common sense – God wouldn’t ask me to do something like this; it just doesn’t make sense. There is human affection on that pan – this is the child I have longed for all my life, the boy I have loved since before he was born, who I have seen play in our yard and follow me around on my daily chores, the one I have watched grow into young manhood; I don’t think I can go through with it. And joining with common sense and human affection is lifelong ambition – it is through Isaac that I will have descendants, and they are to be a blessing to the world; how can that ever happen if I obey God and sacrifice him? On the other pan Abraham places faith. He trusts in God’s promises even when he can’t see them; he trusts in God’s love even when he can’t feel it; he trusts in God’s blessing even when he can’t imagine how God will bestow it upon him. In the end, trust outweighs all those things on the other side, and Abraham passes the test of faith. As we leave the story of Abraham’s great test of faith, I leave us with this thought: Which way are the scales of your life and of my life tipping this morning?