

Rev. Dan Welch Lent 1 2-21-21 Text: Genesis 22:1-18

During these three gut-wrenching days of Abraham's life, I have to believe he thought to himself, "Something is terribly wrong here." I would agree with him. Something is drastically wrong here. Even though we know the end of the story, you can't help but read this Bible passage and say, "Something is drastically wrong for God to command a father to slaughter his beloved son."

When we step back from this passage and just look at what's happening, something is drastically wrong. You can see how wrong it is because of the love in this father-son relationship. God says, "Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love" (v 2). Abraham loves Isaac, born to him in his old age. Watching him grow up, Isaac would be the apple of his eye, the light of his life. You can hear that love in the conversation between Abraham and Isaac. "My father, here's the wood and the fire, but where's the lamb for the sacrifice?" "My son, God will provide" (cf vv 7, 8). *My father. My son.* This relationship is definitely one of love.

Then to hear God say, "Go sacrifice him." Those few words had to strike at Abraham's heart. How could you ask that of this father, God?

A father is told to sacrifice his son. Something is drastically wrong here, but not just on that human level. On another level, God's promises are at stake here. He has promised that Abraham will be the father of many nations, that his offspring will be as numerous as the stars in the sky or the sand on the seashore. A promise that out of Abraham's line will be born One who will be a blessing to all nations. To kill Isaac is to break a promise, to go back on what God has told Abraham.

Something is drastically wrong when God tells a father to slaughter his son and when God's promises come into question.

But not just back in Abraham's time. Today, when we see what happens to children, we say, "Something is drastically wrong."

Last year, well over 500 people were killed or wounded by gunfire in Minneapolis— by far the highest tally in at least 15 years, according to crime data from the Minneapolis Police Department. Homicides have also surged to levels not seen since the 1990s. Police officials say that (while) more adults are being shot, ... young people are still most likely to be the victims of gun violence. In recent months, two 14-year-olds were shot in separate

incidents, one of whom was struck and wounded by gunfire during an altercation in downtown Minneapolis. In June, 17-year-old Diontae Wallace was fatally gunned down in north Minneapolis, and four months later his brother, Da'Vontae Wallace, also 17, was shot to death. And another 17-year-old was shot three times in the span of a month and a half. ([Amid sharp rise in Minneapolis shootings, slayings, a solution appears elusive](#) By [Libor Jany](#) Star Tribune NOVEMBER 14, 2020)

It used to be the creed on the street that you did not kill women and children. Now it's changed. You do someone else in before you get done in yourself, and it doesn't matter who gets in the way. So, children die. And we simply say, "Something is drastically wrong."

St. Jude's Children's Hospital is a hospital that does research for children who have cancer. Because of generous donations from the public, this hospital is able to provide free care for those children. Thankfully, because of those donations, many of those children now live. But some don't. Children still die of horrendous diseases, and we think, "Something is wrong here."

I've read that anxiety and worry among teenagers, perhaps the same age as Isaac in our text, have skyrocketed (even more so during the stay-at-home learning that has been so widespread over the past 11 months) and, with that high rate of depression is teenage suicide. Something is wrong. Take every school shooting—Columbine, Parkland, Sandy Hook, all the others—and add to them the other mass murders: Las Vegas concert, Pulse nightclub in Orlando, Boston Marathon bombing. Every one of those victims was somebody's child. Something is wrong here.

Getting back to Abraham, as the elderly Patriarch journeyed the mountain, those three days must have been horrendous. That's because he knew what he was going to do at the end of them. But a couple of sentences in our text indicate that Abraham had hope. He trusted that somehow God would provide. He says to the two servants, "You stay here. I and the boy will go up to the mountain and will come back to you" (cf v 5). He does not say, "I will come back to you," but, "I and the young boy will come back to you." He's trusting that God will provide. Or after Isaac's question, "Father, here's the wood and the fire, but where's the lamb?"

Abraham replies, “God will provide it” (cf vv 7, 8). With those words, we are listening to Abraham holding on in hope to God’s promise. He has hope that God will work out the details here, and that trust, that hope, that belief takes him all the way to the moment when he has the knife in his hand at Isaac’s throat.

Now someone might say that Abraham was telling a little lie so that nobody knew what was going to happen. Or perhaps it was a prophetic word. Well, in the Book of Hebrews (11:17–19) we get a better answer. “By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises was in the act of offering up his only son, of whom it was said, ‘Through Isaac shall your offspring be named.’ He considered that God was able even to raise him from the dead, from which, figuratively speaking, he did receive him back.” Did you hear how that description of Abraham started? By faith. By faith, Abraham took Isaac up that mountain.

At that moment, Abraham’s faith held on to the promise that God would provide. In this case, God did provide by sparing Isaac’s life. But on

a bigger, broader, deeper level, God provided. We get a glimpse of it. Isaac carries the wood for a sacrifice. Jesus carries the cross for His sacrifice. Isaac is the son, the only son, whom Abraham loved. Jesus is the Son, the only Son, whom the Father loves. A ram is in a thicket to be sacrificed in the place of Isaac. Jesus, on the cross, takes our place, and is sacrificed for us. The promises come true. Through Isaac, Abraham's descendants are numerous. From Abraham's offspring comes Jesus. God provides— forgiveness, life, salvation.

God provides and keeps His promises for us as well. In Romans chapter 8, Paul wrote, "If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also **with Him** graciously give us all things?" (vv 31–32). Jesus is not only **for us** on the cross. He has risen from the dead to be **with us** as well.

When everything looks so wrong, God provides by keeping His promises **for us** and being **with us**.

In John chapter 11, Lazarus's death and Jesus' conversation with Martha and Mary show both the "for us" and "with us" beautifully. Jesus

had a messenger come to Him one day to tell Him that one of His closest friends, Lazarus, was sick and about to die. For some reason, Jesus waits two days before going. When He finally arrives, Lazarus's sister Martha meets Him and says to Him, "Lord, if you would have been here, my brother wouldn't have died." Can you hear it in her voice? "Something's wrong here, Jesus. You weren't here for us." Then in the conversation, Jesus makes an incredible promise for us: "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me, will live even though he dies and whoever lives and believes in Me will never die. Do you believe this, Martha?" (cf Jn 11:21, 25-26). She makes the good confession. She holds on, she believes in what Jesus will do for her. Then He goes to Mary. She has been crying. She, too, says, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died" (v 32). But this time Jesus doesn't have a conversation with her. This time Jesus does something different. He weeps with her. He cries with her.

There was a meme on Facebook about Lazarus's death and Jesus' tears that caught my attention. It made me consider that Jesus knew

Lazarus was dead, even before the messenger told Him. And yet Jesus cried when He heard the news. Jesus knew He could and would raise Lazarus back to life. But still Jesus cried because His friend had died. Jesus knew that His death would defeat death for Lazarus and all people, and yet still, Jesus cried about Lazarus's death. The meme concluded:

“knowing how the story ends doesn't mean you can't cry at the sad parts.”

Knowing the end of the story doesn't mean you can't cry during the sad parts. At those moments, God provides. God keeps His promises. Jesus is with us even when things are so wrong.

God provides by keeping His promises written on a cross and an empty tomb. He is always by your side. You are never alone. He hears our prayers. He surrounds us with His grace. God is never more than a prayer away. He restores my soul.

Like Abraham, we are simply called to believe, to trust that God will provide, that He is with us, and to hope. Not unlike what Jesus did, I still expect to cry at times when things seem so wrong. I expect everyone to cry, for you to cry, when things seem so drastically wrong.

But there will come a day of no more tears. Jesus will come back. On that glorious day of resurrection, He will do for us what we could never do. Children will no longer have to worry about being killed or think about suicide or dying of horrible diseases. Instead, everything will be dramatically right. But until that day, we will cry at the sad parts. And like Abraham, when that happens, all we can do is trust that God will provide because Jesus is with us and He keeps His promises. Amen.