

Text: Genesis 22:1-18

¹ Some time later God tested Abraham. He said to him, "Abraham!" "Here I am," he replied. ² Then God said, "Take your son, your only son, Isaac, whom you love, and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains I will tell you about." ³ Early the next morning Abraham got up and saddled his donkey. He took with him two of his servants and his son Isaac. When he had cut enough wood for the burnt offering, he set out for the place God had told him about. ⁴ On the third day Abraham looked up and saw the place in the distance. ⁵ He said to his servants, "Stay here with the donkey while I and the boy go over there. We will worship and then we will come back to you." ⁶ Abraham took the wood for the burnt offering and placed it on his son Isaac, and he himself carried the fire and the knife. As the two of them went on together, ⁷ Isaac spoke up and said to his father Abraham, "Father?" "Yes, my son?" Abraham replied. "The fire and wood are here," Isaac said, "but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?" ⁸ Abraham answered, "God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son." And the two of them went on together. ⁹ When they reached the place God had told him about, Abraham built an altar there and arranged the wood on it. He bound his son Isaac and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. ¹⁰ Then he reached out his hand and took the knife to slay his son. ¹¹ But the angel of the LORD called out to him from heaven, "Abraham! Abraham!" "Here I am," he replied. ¹² "Do not lay a hand on the boy," he said. "Do not do anything to him. Now I know that you fear God, because you have not withheld from me your son, your only son." ¹³ Abraham looked up and there in a thicket he saw a ram caught by its horns. He went over and took the ram and sacrificed it as a burnt offering instead of his son. ¹⁴ So Abraham called that place The LORD Will Provide. And to this day it is said, "On the mountain of the LORD it will be provided." ¹⁵ The angel of the LORD called to Abraham from heaven a second time ¹⁶ and said, "I swear by myself, declares the LORD, that because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, ¹⁷ I will surely bless you and make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as the sand on the seashore. Your descendants will take possession of the cities of their enemies, ¹⁸ and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed, because you have obeyed me."

Prayer of the Day:

Lord our strength, the battle of good and evil rages within and around us, and our ancient foe tempts us with his deceits and empty promises. Keep us steadfast in your Word, and when we fall, raise us up again and restore us through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Verse of the Day: Matthew 4:10b

It is written: "Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only."

Sermon Text:

You shall have no other gods. What does this mean? You should fear, love, and trust in God above all things. Thus says Luther's Small Catechism when it comes to the topic of the First Commandment. Easiest one to memorize. Hardest one to keep. It's actually referred to as the King Commandment because well, break any of the others and it's obvious that something else came before God or you would have listened to God's Word and will for your life at that moment.

It's easy to talk about the commandments in the abstract. No real skin in the game, it's easy to think about them a lot like we think about math, english, science, or history in school disembodied facts and figures good for stuffing the head full of facts and figures but what's the complaint of almost every student at some time or another? When are we ever going to use this? Students, the answer is always plenty! But you get the point, it's easy to simply learn these things and move on by never really taking the time to apply them in our everyday lives.

Today, Abraham doesn't have that luxury. The first commandment gets frighteningly real, with honest to goodness skin in the game, his son Isaac's skin, more than that, his very life. Today, to prove his commitment to God, that he fears, loves and trusts in God above all things, Abraham is asked for **AN UNTHINKABLE SACRIFICE**. But then perhaps we should be careful as we contemplate it. For this lesson, well, **IT EXPOSES OUR GUILT**. Of course, **IT** also **EXPRESSES GOD'S LOVE**.

Every time I think about this lesson I come to the same conclusion. Abraham was a better man, and a better believer than I am. I have four kids 2 girls, 2 boys and quite frankly over my dead body does anyone take them from me, at least until marriage which can happen when they are in their late 60's as far as I'm concerned right now. Just kidding, well only kind sorta. Anyway, I digress. But seriously, can you even begin to imagine God speaking those words of our lesson to you, if you have been blessed with children? *Take your son, your only son, Isaac, whom you love, and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains I will tell you about.*"

And what does Abraham do? *Early the next morning Abraham got up and saddled his donkey. He took with him two of his servants and his son Isaac. When he had cut enough wood for the burnt offering, he set out for the place God had told him about. What about when they get there? When they reached the place God had told him about, Abraham built an altar there and arranged the wood on it. He bound his son Isaac and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood.* ¹⁰ *Then he reached out his hand and took the knife to slay his son.*

Now Martin Luther once wrote of this portion of God's Word, *Thus Abraham relies on the promise and attributes to the Divine Majesty this power, that He will restore his dead son to life; for just as he saw that Isaac was born of a worn-out womb and of a sterile mother, so he also believed that he was to be raised after being buried and reduced to ashes, in order that he might have descendants, as the Epistle to the Hebrews (11:19) states: "God is able to give life even to the dead. Accordingly, Abraham understood the doctrine of the resurrection of the dead, and through it alone he resolved this contradiction, which otherwise cannot be resolved; and his faith deserves the praise it receives from the prophets and apostles. These were his thoughts: "Today I have a son; tomorrow I shall have nothing but ashes. I do not know how long they will lie scattered; but they will be brought to life again, whether this happens while I am still alive or a thousand years after my death. For the Word declares that I shall have descendants through this Isaac, even though he has been reduced to ashes. (Luther's Work's Volume 4)"*

Sorry, but nope! I couldn't do it. Not only would I fail the test Abraham passes with flying colors but what of Isaac? We don't hear of any backtalk, screaming, fighting or anything else as all this ensues. Everyone in this lesson has stronger faith than I can even contemplate.

What about you? In our worship planning materials a now glorified Daniel Deutschlander writes, "What do you love so much that it would be impossible to willingly and gladly give up if the Lord required it? Would you give up your son? Abraham got up early and went straight ahead to obey. Would you? When God has required you to give something up, some time, some friend, some money, some popularity, out of love and loyalty to His Word, did you do it? Did you do it gladly and willingly? If God would ask you now to give up house and home, wealth and position, all that you are and have, would you get up early and go straight to it? If he took these things away, would you complain about it? If you do not love God enough to give up your son for him, why should he give up His Son for you? But that's what he promises in the closing verses of the reading. The offspring, descended from Isaac, in whom we will really be blessed, deserves our all. We deserve nothing. How little he gets. How much he gives just to forgive the littleness of our heart's devotion. Everything is opposite and upside down of the way we would expect and the way we deserve. Do you still think you have nothing to repent of?"

Yikes! But then that's exactly why we have our Savior. You see God commits to the same **UNTHINKABLE SACRIFICE** that He asks of Abraham but with one major difference, He knows He is going to have to go through with it. We are the sinful sons who deserve to be slaughtered Jesus will be the ram sacrificed in our place. He fulfills this Old Testament lesson in more way than one and why? Because there is nothing that God would not have given up for you. That's John 3:16 is it not? *God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son*

For me and for my sin, God **EXPRESSES HIS LOVE** with a simply **AN UNTHINKABLE SACRIFICE**. Because I can't give God even one of my children, He gives up His only One. Quite frankly because even the earthly stuff which is here today and tomorrow becomes worn out trash is often too important to me to give up for Him, He gives us His best and most precious.

When we contemplate it all again this year, hopefully it is not simply some empty knowledge we stuff into our brains and refuse to apply to ourselves. When we see it again this year, may we see more than our own overwhelming guilt. When we see it again, may we see the love in the unthinkable which moves us to love Him in return, not by sacrificing our kids, but by making sure they know about Him. That they know about what is most important, the saving love of God and the cross which makes us all blessed children of Abraham, blessed children of God and which would allow us to press all that we have into the service of Him that even more may know of the Unthinkable sacrifice and the inexpressible love of our God. Amen!