

“Trust”

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Bruton Parish Church, Williamsburg, VA
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Genesis 22:1-14, Psalm 13, Romans 6:12-23, Matthew 10:40-42

There’s a wonderful website called Working Preacher that provides commentaries and reflections on each week’s lectionary. One of the commenters this week, Rolf Jacobson, suggested that many of us read stories from scripture and immediately ask, “What is this telling me to do?” After all, there are many commandments in both the Old and New Testaments. Seems reasonable that we would turn to the Bible to tell us what to do. But the Bible isn’t just a book of instructions. There are rules and commandments in it, but there are also stories and parables and letters and poetry and songs and dreams and visions and prophecies and laments.

So, Rolf Jacobson suggests that a more helpful way to approach scripture is to ask, “What does this text mean?” and “What does it mean for me?”¹

It’s a good thing this Sunday that we don’t have to assume the text is telling us what to do because we have that terribly difficult story of God testing Abraham by instructing him to sacrifice Isaac. Just to be clear – parents, this is not a story telling you what to do. No matter how frustrated you are by months of quarantine, God does not want you to sacrifice your children!

¹ Rolf Jacobson, <https://www.workingpreacher.org/craft.aspx?post=5441>.

Kids – do not fear. No matter how frustrated you and your parents get with each other, no matter how much you might mess up sometimes, God does not want your parents to sacrifice you.

So, if this story isn't telling us what to do, then let's look at what it might mean for us. Three years ago, I preached on this text, going through many possible meanings and interpretations, and I'm happy to share that sermon with those who want to wrestle with it more. But for today, I'd like to ask some questions and to suggest that we look at the theme of trust, not only in the story of Abraham and Isaac but also in our Gospel text.

Dan McClain did a short reflection on the Genesis passage for our staff meeting this week. In it he made the point that God *does* ask us to put God first in our lives. Before everything else, including family, possessions, security, power, reputation, comfort – everything. Just as God asked Abraham to put God first, so God asks us the same.

What things do we put first in our lives?

What would have to change for us to put God first?

Over and over Abraham did put his trust in God, from the first moment that God called Abraham to go forth from his country. And, like all of us, sometimes he slipped. Look at what happened with Hagar and Ishmael. In his desire for a son, Abraham took things into his own hands instead of trusting God's promise.

In today's story it appears that Abraham is back to putting his trust in God – trusting that God will provide, trusting that his son will be safe in God's hands.

What would it take for us to trust God with the things that are most important to us?

Do we believe God will provide, even when we can't see how?

God does provide in this story. Perhaps a little too last minute in my estimation. But God does provide a sacrifice, and it isn't the life of Isaac. Abraham only sees the one way, but God provides the way out of what seems impossible.

When has that happened to you?

When has God provided *another* way when you've thought you've seen the *only* way?²

It amazes me sometimes how I wrestle and struggle and try to control, and I think that there's only one way something can go, and then lo and behold, God works it out in a completely unexpected way. Usually better than whatever I was planning. If only I had trusted! When it happens, it is good news indeed.

Turning to our Gospel passage from Matthew we have what on first glance seems like some clear instructions from Jesus. Welcome the stranger. Welcome the prophet. Welcome the righteous one. Give water to those who need it so that you don't lose your reward.

Offering welcome is a very good and biblical thing to do. But I wonder if that's what this passage means for us.

Jesus is finishing up a long speech that he's giving to his disciples. He's sending them out in his name into a world that may not welcome them. He has given them

² Thanks to the Rev. Robin Teasley for this line.

instructions, warned them of difficulties they will encounter, encouraged them, and now he is concluding his instructions by telling them that even though it's dangerous out there, they will find welcome. They will find people who receive them and people who help them. And for those who do, it will be as if they are receiving Jesus himself and welcoming him.

We too are disciples of Jesus, being sent out in his name. Instead of being the ones doing the welcoming, we are supposed to be the ones going out. Out from our churches, out from our walls, in the name of Jesus, who died and rose again, and bearing the image of God. Whoever welcomes us welcomes the one who sent us.

Jesus equips us and sends us out, knowing that there's danger out there, but promising that we will receive welcome and that those who welcome us will be blessed. Our job is to trust. Trust that we matter to him. Trust that he is with us.

Just like when we're reading scripture, we want to know what to do, especially in a time where it's not always wise to go out. But even before the pandemic, many of us weren't sure we knew how to heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers and proclaim that the kingdom of heaven has drawn near. Jesus' first disciples were going out to a world who had never heard the good news. Most of the people we know have. Or think they have. (pause)

But you don't have to look very far to see people in need of some good news.

I wonder if what we need to do is to spend some time thinking about what the good news is to us. It's hard to proclaim something if we don't know what it is. As

followers of Jesus, disciples of the risen Christ, we ought to have a powerful message to share not only when we speak but also in every action we take.

So this week I invite you to consider how you've experienced the good news of Jesus Christ in your life.

What are some ways you could share that good news?

Then, when you're ready, put your trust in God and ask for the way to be opened.

You might be surprised how it does.