

Dear Friends in Christ,

I ask that you will bear with me for a moment because I'm dragging us back in time to the Old King James Version of the Bible and because I like the sharpness of the Word of God from this translation of Isaiah 64:6 "But we are all as an unclean *thing*, and **all** our righteousnesses (and that's an older English use of the plural for righteousness, doing the right things) *are* as **filthy rags**; and we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away."

I ask that you will bear with me for a moment because I'm dragging us back in time to the 1961 edition of Webster's because I like the clarity and simplicity of this definition of the adjective *righteous*: "doing...that which is right...free from wrong, or sin; virtuous." With that in mind, it has been stated: "Many people...see the evil and wrongs in their life and think they can make themselves clean by bringing the good in their life to bear on the problem. But it doesn't work that way." (Source unknown.) Well, it doesn't; it doesn't because "all our righteousnesses (what we see as the good things we do) are as filthy rags."

We're on the way to Calvary. We see how dark and dying this world is. We see the filth of sin in our lives. But hope and comfort are always there. *It's About What God Does...*

PROVIDES

I. Gives a Picture of Things to Come.

After these things God tested Abraham and said to him, "Abraham!" And he said, "Here I am." He said, "Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains which I shall tell you." (vv. 1-2)

It's quite a picture. God commands a man to take his only son and sacrifice him, offer him as a burnt offering. The burnt offering was made for unintentional sins and expressed complete devotion to the Lord. The reality is this: In this incident, God was giving the Old Testament Church a picture of things to come. In this reality of Abraham and Isaac He impresses upon the New Testament church the critical continuity between the Old and New Testaments. Our text from Genesis 22 would be fulfilled in "For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son." (Jn. 3:16) But that's not all.

We're looking at the most remarkable display of faith by both Abraham and Isaac. We're told, "Then Abraham said to his young men, 'Stay here with the donkey; I and the boy will go over there and worship and come again to you.'" (v. 5) It's not "I...will come again to you." It's "I and the boy will go over there...and come again to you." Both Abraham and Isaac will return. The writer of Hebrews gives the commentary here: "(Abraham) considered that God was able even to raise him (Isaac) from the dead, from which, figuratively speaking, he did receive him back. (Heb. 11:19)

What's truly remarkable is the fact that there was no argument with God; no whining or crying or debate from either father or son. There is a simple faith that explicitly trusts God in what most would see as a shocking and deplorable moment. Abraham's and Isaac's faith is astounding. He said to Isaac: "God will provide for himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son." (v. 8) Isaac remains silent. That's it!

II. The Intervention.

Next, God provides the intervention:

When they came to the place of which God had told him, Abraham built the altar there and laid the wood in order and bound Isaac his son and laid him

on the altar, on top of the wood. Then Abraham reached out his hand and took the knife to slaughter his son. But the angel of the Lord called to him from heaven and said, "Abraham, Abraham!" And he said, "Here I am." He said, "Do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him, for now I know that you fear God, seeing you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me." (vv. 9-13)

We know the rest of the account. God provides: "And Abraham lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, behind him was a ram, caught in a thicket by his horns. And Abraham went and took the ram and offered it up as a burnt offering instead of his son. So Abraham called the name of that place, 'The Lord will provide...'"

Two things to note. First the Presence of The Angel of the Lord. This is not simply an angel. Again, in verse 12, The Angel of the Lord says, "...you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me." Next, verses 15-17 give us these words:

And the angel of the Lord called to Abraham a second time from heaven and said, "By myself I have sworn, declares the Lord, because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, I will surely bless you, and I will surely multiply your offspring as the stars in heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore. And your offspring shall possess the gate of his enemies..."

It is obvious. We're told, "...the angel of the Lord...said, 'By myself I have sworn, declares the Lord...". This is the Lord. H. C. Leuphold writes, "...this person is divine and specifically the one who later assumed the form of man." (H. C. Leuphold, *Exposition of Genesis*, Baker Book House, p. 628) This is the pre-incarnate Christ speaking.

The second point is made up of these terms from our text: "Abraham rose up...took his son Isaac...cut the wood for the burnt offering...took in his hand the fire (that would turn his son into ashes) and (the) knife" that would take his son's life. His only son.

III. Our Provision.

The picture of the Passion is given. God "rose up", so to speak, when He long ago decided to address our fierce, filthy, damning sin. God "took His Son", so to speak, when He sent Jesus and Jesus willingly came into this world of sin and shame to be our offering. God "cut the wood", so to speak, when He designated the Roman Cross as the means to offer His Son. God "took the fire and the knife", so to speak, when He had His Son beaten, whipped, mocked, and crucified at Calvary. For you! For me! It's what God did: PROVIDED.

I quoted it earlier in the sermon. We can say it in our sleep. But let us never tire of saying it: "For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life." (Jn. 3:16) This is what The Angel of the Lord brought into this world with His birth, life, suffering, death and resurrection. This is what is given to us through the Scriptures, our Baptisms and our taking of the Lord's Supper. It's the fulfillment of the promise given to Abraham: "and in your offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed because you have obeyed my voice." (v. 18)

Recall that moment when Pilate was trying to have Jesus released because he knew He was innocent; these words from St. Matthew's Gospel:

Now at the feast the governor was accustomed to release for the crowd any one prisoner whom they wanted. And they had then a notorious prisoner called Barabbas. So when they gathered, Pilate said to them "Whom do you want me to release for you: Barabbas, or Jesus who is called Christ?" (27:15-17)

And, of course, we well remember the outcome: "He (Pilate) released the man who had been thrown into prison for insurrection and murder, for whom they asked, but he delivered Jesus over to their will." (Lk. 23:25)

Barabbas. He is a symbol of all humanity. Many will protest that statement, but the Scriptures are clear: "Sin is lawlessness." (I John 3:4) And, of course, "But we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags." (Is. 64:6a) We're guilty of sin and God declares the death penalty against us. The list of our crimes is massive: hatred, lies, lust, endless excuses for not doing what we know we should do before a Holy God, unnumbered volumes of gossip and slander and character assassination!

Instead of condemning us to eternal hell, the Father sent His Son - The Lamb - the Angel of the Lord - to be our burnt offering. It's a piece of Scripture that always sharpens the focus for me. I hope for you. "In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation (that is, the gift to gain favor) for our sins." (I Jn. 4:10)

You see, Jesus died for murderers like Barabbas, prostitutes like Rahab, hated tax collectors like Matthew, adulterers and murderers like David. He died for people who mess up, have to swallow a lot of regrets and, sometimes, can't find their way through an open door with the lights on; people who are afraid of tomorrow and horrified by death. He died for you - for me - for all! And you can count on it: He loves us beyond anything we can imagine. He loves us today, tomorrow and forever. *It's about what God does.*
Provides - a complete cleansing from our filth!

Amen.

Pastor Bill Abbott

First Sunday in Lent

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Genesis 22:1-18: “Provides

- I. Gives a Picture of Things to Come.*
- II. The Intervention.*
- III. Our Provision.*

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