

## Thoughts on the Old Testament Reading:

Today's readings are rich. While I am sharing a sermon below based on Psalm 13, I want to spend just a moment with our Old Testament text. Today we hear the very difficult story of God calling Abraham to take his son Isaac up the mountain and sacrifice him on an altar for the Lord. This is not often on people's lists of favorite Bible stories. Who wants to think about God asking a father to sacrifice his son? I want to encourage you to sit with this reading at some point today and consider four things.

1. **God is God.** Too often we have the tendency to make God in *our* own image. We imagine God the way we want God to be. God is friend and comforter, there when we need. This text is a good reminder that God is above all. God is not always what we want God to be. God is God. This means we will not always understand God's ways. Do we need to ask God to free us from our image of God, freeing us to imagine God as God?
2. **God commands us to do difficult things.** Has Christianity gotten too "comfy"? Obeying God never came with the promise of ease. Consider Abraham's story. In the New Testament, the call to discipleship led to the cross. What difficult things is God commanding us to do today?
3. **We are to have no other gods.** We are to fear and love God above all else. Isaac is not only Abraham's son, but the reality of God's promise to make of Abraham a great nation. God desires to know that Abraham loves God more than son, status, future. What idols is God commanding us to carry to the altar of our Lord?
4. **God provides.** Isaac asks Abraham "where is the lamb?" We are reminded of Jesus, lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. Today we give thanks to God who provides, to God who forgives, to God who saves us from our limited imaginations and our lack of faithfulness. This text is hard - who wants to think about God asking a father to sacrifice his son? "For God so loved the world that he gave his only son..." John 3:16 Isaac asked "where is the lamb?" – crucified, died and risen for you!

## Sermon for Sunday, June 28 based on Psalm 13:

How long O Lord? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me?

We hear the Psalmist call out to God. He is distraught by all that is happening around him. He is upset because in his circumstances he feels *an absence* of God ... "How long O Lord – I can't see you"

The Psalmist continues, "How long must I bear pain in my soul, and have sorrow in my heart? How long shall my enemy be exalted?"

He seems to equate the harsh realities that he is experiencing with God's absence. I bear pain in my soul and sorrow in my heart - God must have forgotten me. My enemies are exalting - God must be hiding from me.

We can relate to the Psalmist. We have each had times when the circumstances in our lives have caused us to question - where are you Lord?

This past month we have looked at the world around us and have seen death and destruction. We have watched cities ablaze. We have seen the reality of racism play out across the nation. We have watched these images upon the backdrop of daily coronavirus numbers and fierce arguments over how to protect the public. We have watched as things started to open only to see numbers spike and regulations return. Our brains race ahead, when will this end – what is going to happen with jobs, with school, with church. Our anxiety rising... How long O Lord...we don't see you?"

We hear the words of the Psalmist and collectively as a people we feel the pull in our hearts... Have you forgotten us? Where are you hiding? I have heard people say "If God were real, things wouldn't look this way..."

Interestingly the Psalmist never questions the reality of God. He is only struggling because he has lost sight of God... in the pain, the sorrow, the presence of his enemies...

We lose sight of God - maybe because of where we expect God can or cannot be found - maybe because of where we are or aren't willing to see God.

When my daughter was little we used to do a lot of Seek and Find books. In particular, she liked the "Where's Waldo?" version - open the book and search each page for the little man wearing red and white stripes. But Serena didn't like to look on every page. She only wanted to see Waldo on the "pretty" pages. She would skip the pages displaying battle scenes, pirate ships, forlorn islands. But no doubt Waldo was on those pages...

Can we see God on the undesirable pages? In the not so pretty places? Within our ugly circumstances? Don't we wish that God would come and pull us out of such circumstances instead?

Amidst his anguish the Psalmist requests "Lord -Give light to my eyes" - "Shine a flashlight on your presence Lord".

Following his request the Psalmist proclaims "I trusted in your steadfast love". The word steadfast comes from a Hebrew word that describes "the character of one who keeps his promises, proves faithful, establishes justice, and defends the vulnerable" <sup>1</sup>

God has the character of the one who keeps promises, proves faithful, establishes justice and defends the vulnerable. God has the character the one who can be found in our "un-pretty"...

<sup>1</sup>Lutheran Study Bible p.860

We see God's steadfast character revealed in Jesus. God coming near to us in our real circumstances. God not hidden but taking on our flesh walking around in our brokenness. God that does not abandon and hide but journeys towards the cross, taking all our sin, pain, sorrow, even our blindness and lack of faith unto himself in the crucifixion. God - not forgetting us but rather dying and rising again that we may trust that we can never be lost to God, not even in death because in Christ we are forever brought into God's eternal presence.

Steadfast God, you come seeking us. You show up on all our pages. You are with and beyond last breaths, there as the buildings burn, in the march for justice, amidst the sick, alongside the longings, with the enemy.

God is with you.

Yesterday there was a post on Facebook from "Mindful Christianity Today" that read:

The deepest level of worship is

Praising God through the pain

Thanking God during the trials

Trusting God when we are tempted to lose hope

And loving God even when God seems distant.

At my lowest, God is my hope.

At my darkest, God is my light.

At my weakest, God is my strength.

At my saddest, God is my comforter.

God give light to your eyes to trust God's presence in pain, sorrow, amidst the enemy. Know that even when you do "sleep the sleep of death" God will not forget you, for God is a steadfast God that does not hide but seeks, drawing all people onto Godself.