

St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church
 Sermon: "God's demand and provision."
 Scripture: Genesis 21:1-3, 22:1-14
 Rev. Steve Fiyk
 November 9, 2025
 Opener: "Eternal Father, Strong to save" #325 (Dykes, Whiting)
 Commemoration Hymn: "O Canada" #800 (Routhier, Lavallée, Galbraith, Weir)
 Choruses: "Shout to the Lord" & "I Lift My Eyes Up"
 Hymn after Sermon: "How Deep the Father's Love for Us" (Townend)
 Closer: "When I Survey the Wondrous Cross" #231 (Watts)
 Remembrance Sunday

Today, on Remembrance Sunday,
 we pause together to remember
 the men and women of our armed forces—
 those whose courage and sacrifice
 have safeguarded the peace and freedoms we enjoy.

Some serve behind the scenes—
 In trades like logistics, human resources, and engineering—
 quietly ensuring that everything runs as it should.

Others serve at what we sometimes call 'the pointy end of the stick,'
 where danger is immediate, and courage is tested daily.

All of them have accepted "unconditionally liability"
 Meaning that they are willing to place their own lives in jeopardy
 To achieve mission success.

We ask so much of them—often everything—
 and yet, too often, we fail to give them
 the care and support they deserve.

This Tuesday, when the community gathers
 At Riverside Park for our annual commemoration
 I will be sharing a vignette of MCpl Erin Doyle.

The burley bearded infantry soldier
 remembered as a 'friendly giant' by his comrades was
 and described as a dutiful son by his mother
 [he called her every Sunday evening no-matter
 Where he was in the world]
 Is the most recent of the city's war dead,
 Killed in action in Afghanistan on August 11, 2008.

Erin was killed by the convergence of three rockets
 Fired at his outpost's tower

Where he was operating the heavy machine gun.

(Adam Day "The Life [And Death] Of Erin Doyle" The Legion Magazine March 7, 2009)

Earlier that summer that outpost had been secured by
 25 Canadians and a group of Afghan National Police.
 But by August it was defended by only ten soldiers.
 Given the small numbers they were unable
 to mount effective clearance patrols to keep the enemy back.
 In the end it was inevitable that the outpost would be attacked.

We demand that our soldiers give us everything.
 And too frequently we fail to provide them
 With the support that they deserve.

Even as we remember those who gave all in service to others,
 we turn now to Scripture,
 where we meet another story of devotion and costly faith—
 one that is met by God's steadfast provision.

Since September we have probed
 Genesis' account of creation,
 the expulsion of humanity from paradise,
 the world's first murder, and Adam's family tree.

We then moved on to explore
 The God's call of Abraham and
 Abraham's negotiation with God
 over the souls of Sodom.

In between these stories we explored the Bible's
 Teaching on topics such as suffering,
 The authority of Scripture, life after death,
 And the dangers of prosperity.

PAUSE

Today we return to the Abraham cycle
 And one of the more challenging stories
 In the entire Biblical collection: the binding of Isaac.

Our first reading from Genesis chapter 21 briefly describes

The fulfillment of a God's promise that an elderly Sarah and Abraham
Would have their own biological offspring.
The impossible happens when the geriatric couple have their own child.
They name him, Isaac, which means laughter.

This birth is a crucial step in God's redemption plan.
God intends to rescue and redeem a creation
that has been spiraling into chaos
ever since humanity was expelled from Eden.

God has chosen to bring this blessing through Abraham
And Abraham's descendants.
And with the arrival of Isaac
The plan moves ahead.

But this is also where everything goes sideways.
In our second reading God tests Abraham's commitment,
By asking him to sacrifice Isaac
that very key to God's rescue plan.

These two readings reveal a holy tension—
between the God who demands everything,
and the God who provides everything.

[ONE] This God demands everything.

We meet this demanding God in Old Testament law:
"You shall have no other Gods..." (Deuteronomy 4:6)
AND you shall "Love the Lord your God with all your heart
and with all your soul and with all your strength. (Deuteronomy 6:5)

We encounter this demanding God in the words of Jesus:
"Anyone who loves their father or mother more than me is not worthy of me;
anyone who loves their son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.
Whoever does not take up their cross and follow me is not worthy of me."
(Matthew 10:37-38)

[ONE] This God demands everything.
And [TWO] this God provides everything.
Today's lesson opens with the provision
Of a gift that was otherwise impossible.

The gift of a son.
Jesus said "Whoever finds their life will lose it,
AND whoever loses their life for my sake will find it." (Matthew 10: 39)

Lets review today's second lesson
So we might see this more clearly:

Our second lesson begins with God's decision to test Abraham:
"Some time later God tested Abraham."

Note that the story does not say that God 'tempted Abraham.
"The Hebrew word "tested" does not mean "to entice to do wrong."
With a personal object it means to "test another
to see whether the other proves worthy." (Bruce K. Waltke Genesis 304)

The test will proceed by asking Abraham
To offer his most precious gift back to God, as a burnt offering.
"Take your son, your only son, whom you love—Isaac—
and go to the region of Moriah.
Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on a mountain I will show you."

You may recall that Abraham has another son in Ishmael,
By his wife's servant Hagar.
But Ishmael and Hagar had been sent away.
Leaving Isaac as his only son.
Isaac was Abraham's beloved son.
He was the son of his wife Sarah.
He was the child of God's promise
He was the child through whom God would bless
and redeem the entire world.

In a world where having a descendent meant everything...
From a couple that was given joy and laughter in their twilight years...
God was demanding everything.

And this is where we encounter the most astonishing part of the story:
Abraham obeys.

We are told that the very next morning
"Abraham got up and loaded 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.”

Now we know from an earlier story in the Abraham cycle
That Abraham is bold enough to challenge God
And request a different course of action when need.
We saw this in his negotiation with God over the souls of Sodom.

But despite the costliness of God's demand
Abraham doesn't balk at this request.
Abraham doesn't ask questions.
Abraham doesn't propose a different deal.

So what is going on?

It helps to understand that
Even though child sacrifice is alien and immoral to us
It was practised in ancient cultures/societies.
Archaeological sites like Tophet in Carthage (later Phoenician colony)
and some Canaanite centers show evidence of this happening.

Abraham would have known that gods demand complete devotion.
But even if such a request was deemed legitimate,
What the story tells us is that Abraham believed
That somehow despite the request, God's intention was good.

Consider that Abraham has now been journeying with God for over 25 years.
Over that 25 years there have been times where Abraham has doubted God's care
And questioned the fulfilment of God's promises.

But in Isaac's birth, Abraham has witnessed the impossible.
Now in his later years he has grown in his relationship with God
and has learned something about God's character.
He believes that this God is a source of blessing ,
And that this God keeps his word.

On the basis of this established trust
we can take at face value what he says,
to his servants when he and Isaac leave them at the base of the mountain:
“We will worship and then we will come back to you.”

On the basis of this cemented relationship
We can trust those words he speaks to his son,
When Isaac asks about the worship provisions:
“God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son”

Even as Abraham binds up his son
and places Isaac on the wood on his improvised altar,
Even as Abraham raises his knife to slay his son,
Abraham is convinced that despite immediate evidence,
God is up to something good.

The author of the book of Hebrews notes that Abraham
Was holding firmly to God's promise...
Reasoning that even if Isaac died
God could even raise the dead. (Hebrews 11:19)

Of course what we already know is that Isaac is not killed.
Even though God could rightfully demand that God's gift be returned,
God did not want Isaac dead.

And so even as Abraham raised a knife above Isaac,
And even as he swung it down to kill him,
A strong hand intervened to stop him.
The angel of the Lord spoke to Abraham
And told him to not hurt his child.

God did not want Isaac's death.
God wanted to know Abraham's heart,
God wanted to know who Abraham trusted,
And what he valued most.

The angel of the Lord said to him:
“Now I know that you fear God,
because you have not withheld from me your son, your only son.”

And when Abraham looked up, he saw
A ram with its horns caught up in some branches.
Knowing that this was God's provision,
Abraham took that ram and offered it to God in Isaac's place.

PAUSE

I wonder if this 'test' of Abraham
 Wasn't so much for God to know Abraham's heart
 As much as for Abraham to understand that after
 Years of hope and faith and doubt and questioning
 That he had come to trust in God's good character,
 And God's commitment to God's promises.

I wonder this 'test' of Abraham
 Was even less for him and more for us
 To help us understand that while God is demanding
 And seeks our complete allegiance
 that God will provide all we need.

What you probably don't know is that the place
 Of Abraham's sacrifice,
 that mountain in the region of Moriah ,
 Is understood to be the site of "later Jerusalem, if not on the Temple Hill."
 (Quoting T. C. Mitchell in Bruce K. Waltke Genesis 306)

Could it be that like those prophetic re-enactments
 we see in the lives of Biblical characters such as Hosea or Ezekiel
 (Hosea to act the part of God in marrying a prostitute
 and told Ezekiel to lie on his side for over a year to symbolize the siege of Jerusalem)
 what we see here in this story is an early depiction
 of God's great plan of redemption
 where Abraham plays the part of God
 in the sacrifice of his own son.

Just consider the following...
 (and I'm drawing this comparison from an article
 On the BibleProject's website)

"Both Isaac and Jesus are long-awaited "beloved sons"
 who are born in miraculous circumstances
 Both sons carry the wood
 that is to be the instrument of their deaths on their backs.

In both stories, the father leads the son up a mountain,
 and the son follows obediently toward his own death.
 And in both scenarios, God provides the sacrificial substitute,

which Abraham says will be a ram (a male lamb)
 and the New Testament authors identify as Jesus, "the lamb of God".

(Why did God ask Abraham to sacrifice Isaac? (2024). Retrieved November 5, 2025, from Bibleproject.com website: <https://bibleproject.com/articles/why-did-god-ask-abraham-to-sacrifice-isaac/>)

Today's story demonstrates, typifies, foreshadows,
 God's giving of himself, by offering his very Son
 For the salvation of the world.

What a gift. What a miracle.

We often ask much of others,
 and sometimes give too little in return.
 But our God—the God who asks for our all—
 also gives us all that we need.

Whenever life tests us, whenever faith feels costly,
 we can look to the cross and remember:
 the same God who provided a ram for Abraham,
 provided his own Son for us.

The hope we carry, even in sorrow,
 Is the sure promise that God will provide.
 Thanks be to God. Amen.