

Opening Prayer

Lord, open our hearts and minds by the power of your Holy Spirit that, as the Scriptures are read and discussed, we may hear with joy what you say to us today. Amen.

Genesis 22:1-14

^{22:1} After these things God tested Abraham. He said to him, "Abraham!" And he said, "Here I am." ² 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 that I shall show you." ³ So Abraham rose early in the morning, saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him, and his son Isaac; he cut the wood for the burnt offering, and set out and went to the place in the distance that God had shown him. ⁴ On the third day Abraham looked up and saw the place far away. ⁵ Then Abraham said to his young men, "Stay here with the donkey; the boy and I will go over there; we will worship, and then we will come back to you." ⁶ Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering and laid it on his son Isaac, and he himself carried the fire and the knife. So the two of them walked on together. ⁷ Isaac said to his father Abraham, "Father!" And he said, "Here I am, my son." He said, "The fire and the wood are here, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?" ⁸ Abraham said, "God himself will provide the lamb for a burnt offering, my son." So the two of them walked on together. ⁹ When they came to the place that God had shown him, Abraham built an altar there and laid the wood in order. He bound his son Isaac, and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. ¹⁰ Then Abraham reached out his hand and took the knife to kill his son. ¹¹ But the angel of the LORD called to him from heaven, and said, "Abraham, Abraham!" And he said, "Here I am." ¹² He said, "Do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him; for now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me." ¹³ And Abraham looked up and saw a ram, caught in a thicket by its horns. Abraham went and took the ram and offered it up as a burnt offering instead of his son. ¹⁴ So Abraham called that place "The LORD will provide"; as it is said to this day, "On the mount of the LORD it shall be provided."

Commentary

Perhaps no other episode in the life of Abraham is as perplexing as today's lection from Genesis. God commanded Abraham to offer Isaac, the fulfillment of the ancient promise, as a sacrifice. Again, the divine promise was in danger. This time, however, it was God who seemingly threatened to undo that promise that Abraham's lineage would continue through Isaac. Once more, the faith of the "father of many nations" was to be tested; would he choose

the gift — the cherished son of his old age, or the Giver — the One to whose call he had responded and with whom he was in covenant?

Reflection

Does God test us this way? What sacrifices (hopefully not nearly so dire) has God required of us? What was our response?

Romans 6:12-23

^{6:12} Therefore, do not let sin exercise dominion in your mortal bodies, to make you obey their passions. ¹³ No longer present your members to sin as instruments of wickedness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and present your members to God as instruments of righteousness. ¹⁴ For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace. ¹⁵ What then? Should we sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means! ¹⁶ Do you not know that if you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness? ¹⁷ But thanks be to God that you, having once been slaves of sin, have become obedient from the heart to the form of teaching to which you were entrusted, ¹⁸ and that you, having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness. ¹⁹ I am speaking in human terms because of your natural limitations. For just as you once presented your members as slaves to impurity and to greater and greater iniquity, so now present your members as slaves to righteousness for sanctification. ²⁰ When you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. ²¹ So what advantage did you then get from the things of which you now are ashamed? The end of those things is death. ²² But now that you have been freed from sin and enslaved to God, the advantage you get is sanctification. The end is eternal life. ²³ For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Commentary

Continuing the discussion of freedom from sin in and for obedience, this week's lection explores the very nature of sin in Pauline theology. He is speaking not of "sins"—a series of wrongs committed by the individual, but of "sin"—a locus of power that stands against righteousness. In Chapter 6, Paul outlines three sets of opposing realities—sin and righteousness, freedom and slavery, wages and gift—to prove his points. Through this epistle, Paul has repeatedly asserted that righteousness is the result of faith; faith made possible only through God's grace. That grace cannot be earned. Righteousness is not the "reward" or the "wages" of faithful living. This passage reminds us, too, that eternal life cannot be earned; it can only be given.

Reflection

As Americans, we think of freedom as part of our birthright. What is the difference between this political freedom and the freedom Paul is talking about?

Matthew 10:40-42

^{10:40} "Whoever welcomes you welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me. ⁴¹ Whoever welcomes a prophet in the name of a prophet will receive a prophet's reward; and whoever welcomes a righteous person in the name of a righteous person will receive the reward of the righteous; ⁴² and whoever gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones in the name of a disciple -- truly I tell you, none of these will lose their reward."

Commentary

An act as simple as offering a cup of cold water to "one of these little ones" in the name of a disciple is subject to God's notice and reward. "Little ones" is understood by some scholars to mean "children of God," a term of intimacy between Jesus and his followers; others translate "little ones" as the "most insignificant." Either understanding points to the overriding truth that the disciple's power and status come from the message—and Messenger—they bear. The disciple in this sense is literally offering the world Jesus. The word reward, though undefined, occurs three times here. Reward means there are consequences for our choices. Those who reject the disciples reject the one they serve. For those who receive them, promises Jesus, they will be blessed beyond their own imagining.

Reflection

Does the superiority of others prevent us from fully living out our call to discipleship? Does the thought of being welcomed as Jesus should be welcomed help us overcome this obstacle?

Responsive Psalter

Psalm 13

- ^{13:1} How long, O LORD? Will you forget me forever?
How long will you hide your face from me?
- ² How long must I bear pain in my soul,
and have sorrow in my heart all day long?
How long shall my enemy be exalted over me?
- ³ Consider and answer me, O LORD my God!
Give light to my eyes, or I will sleep the sleep of death,
- ⁴ and my enemy will say, "I have prevailed";
my foes will rejoice because I am shaken.

- ⁵ But I trusted in your steadfast love;
my heart shall rejoice in your salvation.
- ⁶ I will sing to the LORD,
because he has dealt bountifully with me.

Closing Prayer

Grant, O Lord, that what we have said with our lips we may believe in our hearts, and that what we believe in our hearts we may practice in our lives, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.