

First Sunday In Lent
Mark 1:9-13 (Series B)
“All About the Promise”
Feb 28, March 1, 2009

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from our Heavenly Father, and from Jesus Christ, our Lord, Savior, and King. Amen.

God said to Abraham, “Take your son, your only son, whom you love, and go the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you.” As our Old Testament reading indicates, Abraham followed this command.

Let’s recognize the seriousness of this command for Abraham. This was his son God was telling him to sacrifice. Not only that, but the very son Abraham and his wife did not expect to have except through God’s gracious intervention. Both Abraham and Sarah were of an age that would, otherwise, make having a child impossible. Abraham loved this son. And, now, God was telling him to offer him as a sacrifice.

How difficult to even imagine. I have a son myself. And, just thinking about losing my son, well, . . . I’d rather not entertain such a thought, let alone, think of myself as the one responsible for losing him. No doubt about it, this was a serious command God gave to Abraham.

Now, we recognize the seriousness of this command to Abraham, but let’s also recognize a few other important things here. One, there should be no confusion as to what God was after. He wanted a certain type of response from Abraham. Question is, what was that response God wanted? Second, there is no contradiction between what God commanded and how God intervened. God commanded Abraham to sacrifice his son, but God, at the last moment, provided a ram instead. Thirdly, there is no reason to believe God was commanding Abraham to participate in some idolatrous

practice of human sacrifice. God was not interested in the death of Isaac. He was interested in something else. So, what was this response from Abraham God wanted? What was God interested in here?

I want to pull together verse 5 of our Old Testament reading and what it says about this incident in Hebrews 11:17-19. Then I want to go to our Gospel reading. Verse 5 of our Old Testament- “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.’” Notice Abraham does not say he and the boy will go up and only he would come back. But, he indicated that both he and his son would be coming back. And, what Hebrews 11:17-19 states concerning this- “By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises was in the act of offering up his only son, of whom it was said, ‘Through Isaac shall your offspring be named.’ He considered that God was able even to raise him from the dead, from which, figuratively speaking, he did receive him back.”

Abraham remembered the promise God made to him. That his descendants would be as numerous as the stars, and that through a descendant of his all would be saved and given new life. This is the promise Abraham trusted and had faith in. He trusted that God would give life back to his son Isaac. The exact specifics of how that would happen we can not speculate, but we can be sure that Abraham trusted that it was through the Savior to come, the one coming from Abraham’s line. What incredible faith Abraham had. So incredible he was willing to follow through with God’s command in sacrificing his son.

Now let’s consider our Gospel reading from Mark, chapter 1. Jesus was baptized, publicly affirming his ministry. And, immediately, not sometime later, but immediately, the Spirit drove him out into the

wilderness. The Spirit “drove” Jesus out into the wilderness. The Greek word used, translated into “drove” is “ekballei.” The same word often used to denote the force used to drive out demons.

Looking to the Gospel of Luke, 4:1, we know that Jesus was full of the Holy Spirit. The wilderness was, by no means, a comfortable place to be. But, Jesus’ will was in complete harmony with the Holy Spirit’s. Jesus knew this was the plan, the plan to fulfill the promise made all the way back in the Garden of Eden to Adam and Eve that He would send a Savior to rescue them from sin and death.

Jesus was there for forty days being tempted by satan. Here again, the Greek language indicates to us that the temptation was continuous and on-going. Luke tells us, that Jesus fasted on top of this temptation. How miserable. But, it was because of the PROMISE that Jesus went through all this. The same promise God wanted Abraham to respond to.

During this event of Jesus in the wilderness we should not forget, satan, too, was responding to this same promise. As the Gospel of Matthew tells us, satan even quoted Psalm 91 when tempting Jesus- “He will command his angels concerning you,’ and ‘on their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone.’” Yes, satan, fully understood the impact of the promise of Jesus Christ as the Savior from sin and death. He remembered the promise made in the Garden and Eden. Satan was going to do all he could to keep Jesus from fulfilling this promise.

For Abraham, it was all about the promise. For Jesus, it was all about the promise. Even, for satan, it was all about the promise.

This struggle in the wilderness between Jesus and satan was horrific we can be sure. Fasting all those days, out in the midst of barren land, surrounded by wild animals. All three of the Synoptic Gospels- Matthew,

Mark, and Luke, all use the Greek genitive to define the struggle. This genitive usage of the Greek language indicated that it was personal down to the bone for both sides, Jesus and satan. A sort of hand-to-hand, close quarter duel.

And, Mark tells us the angels were ministering to Jesus, indicating Jesus was victorious in the struggle. Would you expect anything less? Of course not, for one, Jesus was God, nothing could over-power Him. But, there is something else important here. Jesus knew it had to be for the promise to be fulfilled. Again, it was all about the promise. Did satan stop once this dual was won by Jesus? Well, Luke tells us that he left Jesus “until an opportune time.”

In Luke we know that the crowds tried to kill Jesus. Satan, again, trying to bring an end to Jesus before the time had come. In the Gospel of John we know that the people tried to crown Jesus in a way He was not to be crowned. Peter, we remember, tried to distract Jesus from going to the Cross, as we find in Matthew. No, satan never ceased to put an end to Jesus’ path to fulfilling the promise because it was the promise that satan couldn’t stand. Again, it was all about the promise.

Satan never succeeded. Against all odds Jesus followed His Father’s will for that promise to be fulfilled. He willingly went where none of us would want to go- to His own suffering and death. There on the Cross of Calvary Jesus died. Yes, death took its toll on Jesus, but being God Himself, death could not hold Him. He was raised from the dead, raised in victory. The battle of all battles, Jesus was victorious.

Friends, that promise of which Abraham responded to with such incredible faith, of which Jesus so faithfully fulfilled, of which satan tried so

hard to keep from being fulfilled- that promise is finished, complete, and has been met.

Somewhere throughout this sermon you may have wondered to yourself, or maybe sometime before this when recalling the story of Abraham sacrificing Isaac, how could you yourself ever compare to Abraham when it comes to obedience and dedication?

Well, if so, consider two important things. One, let God test the faith of Abraham the way God tested Abraham. How God has, does, and will test the faith of each of us is up to God- and we can be sure, there are no two ways the same. Does God test our faith? Should we even ask that question?

Friends, again, it is all about the Promise. That the promise Jesus Christ has paid in full the price for our rebellion against God. That there is nothing for our Father in Heaven to hold against us any longer. And, that we have become heirs of the Kingdom of Heaven. God directed Abraham's mind, heart, and eyes upon that same promise enabling Abraham to respond to it with such incredible obedience. And, this is the same Promise God has set our hearts and minds upon. And, friends, as long as you have been a child of God- you have been responding to this Promise. You've been responding with thankfulness and praise, with obedience and love for God and others. You're here right now in worship, aren't you? Your presence here is a response to the Promise that your sins have been paid for and that you have eternal life.

So, do you have a strong of faith as Abraham's? Here again, the answer to this question is- it's all about the Promise. Yes, you have faith. God has given that to you as a gift in your baptism, renewed each time you hear His Word. Yet, the thing about faith is that faith is not conscience of

itself. The only thing your faith knows is what you have been given- life eternal!

For you, me, and everyone, it is always about the Promise. The Promise is sure, it cannot be destroyed. Yet, satan still knows this. The only thing he can do now my friends is distract us away from that Promise. And, he does try to do just that. Temptation is an awful thing. Jesus knows this; He experienced it Himself in the wilderness. He knows what it is like for each of us when we are tempted. Satan knows just how to do it. He tempts us to give in to our greatest pleasures. He doesn't tempt us with things we do not want. That is why temptation is so difficult. And, the devil works hard at it. Again, because of the Promise!

Rest assured though, Jesus understands the loneliness of our struggle with Satan. He's been there. Yet, as our substitute in the battle, He won. The battle has already been won. That's the Promise. That puts quite a joyful perspective on the temptations we face ourselves, doesn't it?

It's all about the Promise. Our responses, our lives of thankfulness, they are all a natural reaction to what we have been given. Our responses are not how we measure our faith and trust. Our obedience to God's commands are not how we measure how God looks upon us. What matters is the Promise and what it has done to us.

This Sunday marks the beginning of National Lutheran Schools Week. Held each year, we do well during this week to take time in prayer thanking the Lord for what He has given us in our schools. An incredible blessing we've been given- a place we may take our children to be educated and to be continually reminded of the Promise.

I have been here at Trinity nearly two months now. From what I am able to tell we are blessed with our school. When I walk the halls

(sometimes I do this when I've become confused about what I'm suppose to be doing at the time) I notice so much to be thankful for. For one, we have an excellent faculty and staff at our school, dedicated to not only providing an well-rounded education for the children, but also dedicated to bringing the Promise into their lives as a reality for each and every one of them.

You know, parents carry a lot of concern in raising their children. I know. I became a parent within the past year. How am I going to raise my child to be God fearing, to have the faith Abraham had? What a comfort parents may have being assured that it is all about the Promise. Raise your children reminding them everyday of what God promised long ago, of how God fulfilled that same Promise in His own Son, and directing them to look forward to the Day when Jesus will return to take them to Heaven. The obedience and dedication every parent wants is simply nothing other than a true response to what God has done for each of us. And, how blessed we are to be able to bring our children to a school such as what we have here, so they may hear of the Promise again and again.

Friends, what God wants from us and our children is faith in Him, trust, and obedience to His commands. If God left these things to us we would fail. From start to finish- through every temptation, through every test God puts us through- He gives us everything we need. He gives us the Promise that the battle is already won, He gives us something incredible to be thankful for- forgiveness for all our sins and eternal life, and He gives us the faith, the trust, and the strength to be obedient. Amen.