

“The End of Faith is the Fear of God”
5 September 2017
Little Trinity Anglican Church, Toronto

Discussion Questions

Read Genesis 22:1-19 (translation used in sermon attached here) and Luke 14:25-27

1. The sermon suggests that Abraham’s life of faith climaxes in the test that reveals his “fear of God” (v.12). What does it mean to fear God? How does the fear of God relate to love of God (see, e.g., Matthew 22:37)?
2. The drama and power of Genesis 22 is due in part to the spare narrative. Readers must imagine themselves into the story by filling in the contextual details and characters’ thoughts/feelings. As a group, imagine the various “chapters” of the story: e.g., the command to sacrifice Isaac; the journey to Mount Moriah; the near-sacrifice on the mountain; the return home, etc. What details do you supply to flesh out the narrative picture?

- and/or -

Retell this story from different first-person perspectives: Abraham, Isaac, Sarah, God, etc. What do these retellings reveal?
3. How can I love (and/or fear) God, whom I have not seen, more than those who are “flesh of my flesh”? How is that possible and what would it look like?
4. The Italian master Caravaggio painted two depictions of the sacrifice of Isaac. Have someone pull them up on a computer or smartphone. What do you notice about each? Which one do you prefer, and why? See → [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sacrifice_of_Isaac_\(Caravaggio\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sacrifice_of_Isaac_(Caravaggio))
5. A common story among some children of priests/preachers/missionaries is feeling like their parent(s) cared more about the church/faith than they did about them. This is just one example of how people can feel like a sacrifice to someone else’s faith. Has this ever been true in your life? How did it make you feel? How/have your feelings changed over time?
6. Read Luke 14:25-27. Can you be Jesus’ disciple? Are there any concrete situations in your life that Jesus’ words here speak to?

Gen. 22:1-19 (adapted from translation by Robert Alter, *The Five Books of Moses* (2004))

¹ And it happened after these things that God tested Abraham.

And He said to him, "Abraham!" and he said, "Here I am."

² And He said, "Take, pray, your son, your only one, whom you love, Isaac, and go forth to the land of Moriah and offer him up as a burnt offering on one of the mountains which I shall say to you".

³ And Abraham rose early in the morning and saddled his donkey and took his two lads with him, and Isaac his son, and he split wood for the offering, and rose and went to the place that God had said to him.

⁴ On the third day Abraham raised his eyes and saw the place from afar. ⁵ And Abraham said to his lads, "Sit you here with the donkey and let me and the lad walk ahead and let us worship and return to you".

⁶ And Abraham took the wood for the offering and put it on Isaac his son and he took in his hand the fire and the cleaver, and the two of them went together.

⁷ And Isaac said to Abraham his father, "Father!" And he said, "Here I am, my son".

And Isaac said, "Here is the fire and the wood but where is the sheep for the offering?"

⁸ And Abraham said, "God will see to the sheep for the offering, my son".

And the two of them went on together. ⁹ And they came to the place that God had said to him.

And Abraham built there an altar; and laid out the wood; and bound Isaac his son; and placed him on the altar on top of the wood.

¹⁰ And Abraham reached out his hand and took the cleaver to slaughter his son.

¹¹ And the LORD's messenger called out to him from the heavens and said, "Abraham, Abraham!" And he said, "Here I am".

¹² And He said, "Do not reach out your hand against the lad, and do nothing to him, for now I know that you fear God and you have not held back your son, your only one, from Me."

¹³ And Abraham raised his eyes and saw and, look, a ram was caught in the thicket by his horns, and Abraham went and took the ram and offered him up as a burnt offering instead of his son. ¹⁴ And Abraham called the name of that place YHWH-Yireh, as is said to this day, "On the mount of the Lord there is sight."

¹⁵ And the LORD's messenger called out to Abraham once again from the heavens, ¹⁶ and He said, "By My own Self I swear, declares the LORD, that because you have done this thing and have not held back your son, your only one, ¹⁷ I will greatly bless you and will greatly multiply your seed, as the stars in the heavens and as the sand on the shore of the sea, and your seed shall take hold of its enemies' gate. ¹⁸ And all the nations of the earth will be blessed through your seed because you have listened to my voice."

¹⁹ And Abraham returned to his lads, and they rose and went together to Beersheba, and Abraham dwelled in Beersheba.