

SERMON: 28 June 2020 – Rev Alistair Cowper

" God Provider "

(Genesis 22:1-14; Matthew 10:40-4)

After 'these things God tested Abraham' (1) - what things?

The birth of Isaac, the promised heir, at age 100.
And the treaty with Abimelech, and the living in Philistine country for a long time. Perhaps it was this that led to the testing of Abraham's faith.

Testing - Abraham's faith? Abraham's idea of God?

Would this God turn out to be as demanding as all the other gods around, the ones that would demand the sacrifice of your own child?

Or would this God be different?

Would this God turn the tables on sacrificial giving and give everything for us?

That would certainly have been a radical concept of God.

As far as I'm concerned, the story of Abraham and Isaac is a story that intends to show us that this God, the God of Abraham and Isaac, is NOT a god who demands child sacrifice.

This God is different.

This God takes that idea of demanding sacrifice and turns it on its head by becoming the sacrifice that insists that love is at the heart of the relationship and that love is the way.

In this God's kingdom, things are very different from other kingdoms.

And this story, which in the face of it is barbaric, is intended to point us to the God of Infinite Love, who would rather give himself for us than ask anything of us.

Would there be anything at all that this God would ask of us?

Living in the land of the Philistines, it would've been easy to look around and get the wrong idea about God.

Child sacrifice was probably something that other gods demanded - gods that were not God.

If you were surrounded by people offering child sacrifice in order to appease an angry god, what sort of impression does that give when you're trying to form an understanding of who God is and what God is like.

Even today, too many children grow up with the wrong idea of who God is and what God is like.

Too often, god is portrayed as harsh and demanding and against most things.

That needs to change.

Every false idea of God has to die and a new idea born.

That's what happened to Abraham.

That's what needs to happen to all of us.

Can you just imagine how Abraham felt after this?

Isaac was saved the fate he thought God was demanding of him.

Abraham sees God's not harsh and demanding.

God is gracious.

God provides a way out.

God is the provider.

Every need is provided.

It's as if God is sweeping Abraham up in God's arms as a father would lift up their little child and assure them that they needn't worry, they'd be taken care of, all things would be provided.

This true God who wanted to reveal himself to Abraham as the truth, whose essence is pure love.

This God who would draw near and brush away all anxiety and bring in its place complete trust;

like a child living in utter dependence that everything necessary would be provided.

So 'fear' isn't a good translation of what's going on here.

What the Bible writer is trying to teach us is a complete trust in God's providing - 'the Lord will provide' (14).

When we have that trust in God's providing then we are free from the notion that resources are scarce and poverty is out to get us.

Trusting in the God of infinite hospitality heals us from our poverty spirit.

[DORA]

God provides.

Every need is provided.

And God will provide.

Because God provided everything in giving Jesus.

God provided the gift of himself in Jesus.

There's a sense that nothing else matters.

Because all we need is God and the life God gives.

All we need is life, the life that is Christ.

Nothing else matters.

Except that we respond in the right way.

The only way.

And that is to respond by 'setting our hearts on God'.

Like Isaac, trusting in his father to sort it - just as Jesus trusted in the Father to sort it.

Like Abraham, trusting in God to provide.

Who else can we trust to provide all things.

Who else can we give our all to?

Who else can we set our hearts upon?

God has given all things for us.

Are we prepared to give our hearts to God?

And to show that giving in love for our fellow human beings?

Jesus said, 'whoever gives even a cup of cold water' will not go unrewarded (42).

This is an encouragement to, not only live in the certainty of God's providing but also to live in the flow of that generosity by giving generously.

Jesus was the ultimate gift from God.

He came to seek and to save; to reveal the true heart of God as infinite hospitality and unbounded generosity.

He came to correct people's understanding of who God was and what God was like.

Not even the Jews had worked that one out properly.

Look at the religious system that was built up, the hoops people needed to jump through to get right with God - all of it man made and little of it had anything to do with grace.

Jesus came, as the grace of God.

Jesus came, as the grace of God, to show us that hospitality can be found everywhere, if one looks far enough for it.

Jesus said to his followers, 'whoever welcomes you, welcomes me and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me'.

In other words, there are people 'out there' who themselves would be already practising the kind of hospitality that God desires.

Because God, as the Source of all unbounded, unfailing hospitality, can, and does, operate through anyone who cares to welcome the stranger or the undeserving.

God is working things out in the hospitality of strangers.

WHOEVER welcomes you, welcomes me.

All are welcome, all are welcome, all are welcome in this place.

Last week we thought about how Hagar encountered Christ as God in all things when she realised that God could see her and meet her needs in an empty wilderness.

And Abraham encountered Christ as God in all things when he sees God provide everything he needed in a new revelation of who God was and what God was like.

Where is God welcoming you and inviting you to discover God afresh today?

And to those of us who are already followers, what sort of welcome and invitation are we giving other people today?

How are we practising the love of God that reveals Christ in us and through us?

How are we contributing to a better understanding of who God is and what God is like?

How are we being Christ in the world?

And where have we yet to discover Christ?

Until we see Christ is all and in all.