**New Kilpatrick**

**Podcast**

**7th August 2022**

**Genesis 22:1-18**

**Gathering**

Why do we ruin what is good?

What makes us take what is worthwhile

And turn it round?

It is a question for Abraham:

What possessed you

To take Isaac

Your only hope

Your only way into the future

And in some unintelligible moment

Believing some irrational version of an absurd faith

Dare sacrifice Isaac?

What was more important to you?

And why would you want to carry on

With a God who asks you to do this?

Nothing was the same after this.

Why ruin what was good and hopeful

With some jaundiced and perverse trust-game of brinkmanship?

And why in Ukraine and Taiwan and Europe

Do we still find ourselves doing just that?

Welcome to the story of Abraham and Isaac.

Hello, I’m Roddy Hamilton the minister of New Kilpatrick Parish and thank you for the invitation to join you wherever you are. We are slipping and sliding towards the conclusion of our Abraham series next week, but this week we reach a kind of climax. It’s certainly not a highpoint, and it is the worst of stories, but ours is to seek the good news in all of this, for there must be some. I just don’t know, for now, where that might be. Welcome to the search…

**Prayer**

Great God

Almighty

Waiting for our praise

Omnipotent being

Creator of the universe

Can we let these titles go

Lay them aside

For were know you better

As companion

Friend

May we live in relationship with you

A real relationship

That challenges and questions

And wonders about you

That can take the stories we tell

Hear them anew

Of a God of grace

Rather than greatness

And a God of love

Rather than lavishness

God who stands with

Rather than apart

Loving God

In such a relationship as these

May we place here

All that hurts you

Each other

And ourselves

Those moments and words

And attitudes and desires

That harm

And hinder

And hold back your kingdom

And together

Renew our relationship

With a thinking faith

That calls us to respond

With honesty and hope

That is not blind and unquestioning

But fully human

Just as you have created us

And in the end

A relationship that is held together

By grace

And love

And promise

That always

Unconditionally

Remains

Hear us as we say the global prayer together

**Scripture Background**

Some stories are easy and we know them well because we tell them all the time… Some stories are not easy but are still well known because they are hard and confusing… This story is one of the latter: Abraham choosing to sacrifice Isaac…

It is so difficult that surely we need to approach it as a legend that has lost some of its literal content… Jonathan Sacks understands this story as one that sets the Jewish faith completely apart from all other faiths of the time that involved child sacrifice… It is a story that points to the fact that your children are not your own to sacrifice… your children are God’s children… gifts from God… and because of that… you care for them… respect them… honour them… and never hurt them…

Another way of looking at this story is to focus on the ram that is caught in the bushes and used instead of Isaac… It would normally be a lamb that was sacrificed… but the lamb… was Isaac… The young one was let go to live… and the older now was the one that was sacrificed… an image of the older generation passing on the mantle of the future to the young…

And there are many more versions… have a listen are reflect on how you hear this story…

**Scripture**

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[a] 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’;[b] as it is said to this day, ‘On the mount of the Lord it shall be provided.’[c]

15 The angel of the Lord called to Abraham a second time from heaven, 16 and said, ‘By myself I have sworn, says the Lord: Because you have done this, and have not withheld your son, your only son, 17 I will indeed bless you, and I will make your offspring as numerous as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore. And your offspring shall possess the gate of their enemies, 18 and by your offspring shall all the nations of the earth gain blessing for themselves, because you have obeyed my voice.’

**Reflection**

My grandpa often said… even though he was a gentle communist… if everyone just lived by the bible… and especially the sermon on the mount… we’d be in a much better place…

And I would love to offer that thought and sermon to the contenders for Prime Minister… or Vladimir Putin… or anyone who feels a call to lead in this world… and say… “There it is… the Bible… best starting point for you”… I’d also happily offer the scriptures of the Quran… or the wisdom of Confucius…

We believe all you need is there… but there is a lot that doesn’t help the cause… and today’s story is case in point…

How can anyone justify this text of terror… where Abraham seems willing… to do the most horrendous religious act… not to die for his faith… but to kill for it… What do you do with that?…

And Isaac… how does he move on… What kind of relationship will he have with his father now?… There is a Jewish Midrash that suggests that when Abraham travelled down the mountain… Isaac went down the other side… and never was a word passed between them again…

What do you do with that?…

From now on this is the story Abraham will be forever remembered… and will forever leave him with a bad taste in his mouth and a faith he isn’t so sure of…

He feels like a sad old man… soon he will bury his wife in foreign land he will have to purchase… and his own death will not come soon enough… It is a terrible story… and what do you do with it…

Sunday school theology offers a version of this story that tells us it is about trust… the ultimate test… that Abraham’s faith was so strong… he would sacrifice his own son for the Almighty…

I am a father… There is absolutely no way on God’s good earth I would even consider doing that… for any God… Yet the story gives us a man… of whom so much had been asked… leaving home at retirement… living under a ridiculous promise for 25 years… travel to a land he didn’t know… and send one son into the desert to die… Now the son that was left was to be sacrificed…

For centuries we have understood this story of the testing of Abraham… as a success… Abraham passed…

What if we’ve got this wrong… and Abraham actually failed the test… What if the test was to see if Abraham was willing to stand up to God… that there was something he was willing to say “No, God!”… be in relationship rather than a pawn in a game of divine whim…

And the test was to see if he was willing to protect the worth, the love, the dignity of his family… which… up to now… Abraham has frequently failed to do…

We haven’t read the story in this cycle of Abraham where he was willing to sell his wife to protect himself… Last week, in order to mollify the jealousy of Sarah… he was willing to let his son go out into the desert to die…

But, again… instead of standing up for something… he stands aside… for he sees God as some wrathful, vengeful, all-powerful and distant divinity…

Might we consider we have been misinterpreting this story for centuries… and Abraham actually failed the test… He failed to stand up to God… defend the worth and beauty of someone in his own family?… God never wants a blind faith but invites us to challenge and live in relationship with God…

In the final moment… God did what God does all the time… provided a ram… redeemed Abraham… and sent him on his way… with the promise still in tact…

Grace won once again…

That’s a story to tell to the world… that’s one that opens up hope… that in the middle of leadership elections, conflict, cost of living and a pile of other things going on that frighten us… in this story of terror… we find unconditional grace…

**News**

**Prayers for Others**

Creator

We gather our prayers

Of the brokenness of the world

And its beauty

And seek your way through

With grace and justice

For what people have given up

Sacrificed in the name of what is right

And good

And loving

In the conflicts of the world

What the least have given up

Because of those who have most

The powerless

For the sake of some legacy and national myth

In Ukraine, Syria, Somalia, Yemen

And the colder wars

The politics of Taiwan

Of Brexit

Of sanctions

Where it feels we are returning

To the lowest version of ourselves

Unlearning the cost of peace

And what it was like to be at war

And in our leadership

The populism of hearing what we like

And the easy fear of what challenges us

And the lack of ideas and thinking longterm

The quick wins of elections

Rather than the long journey of transformation and compassion

And our own local communities

Those we call neighbours

Who enrich our living

In the diversity we invite

The stories and cultures that deepen relationships

Between us all

And families and friends

And those physically and mentally unwell

Fearful for the future

Making difficult decisions

Hear us, O God

Hear us

So be it

Amen

**Benediction**