

Lives of Service ~ June 29, 2008

Genesis 22:1-14; Matthew 10:40-42; Psalm 13

Every time I read the story of Abraham and Isaac I am troubled by it. Then I remember that it is a story used to point beyond itself to God and to the relationship we all are to have with our Creator. This is true of the stories found in our Bible. The value is not locked within the words and traditions of the text but in what it is they point to beyond themselves.



As I reflect on this story and its meaning for my life, I try to imagine myself as a member of that early nation Israel, perhaps wandering in the wilderness, sitting around a campfire with my children beside me as I listen to the stories of the roots of our Jewish faith and the faithfulness that is required to be one of God's chosen children. As a mother, I wonder how Abraham could even consider sacrificing a child I had longed for and for whom I had hoped many years. But I understand the place of women in that earlier day and age and I can grasp how Sarah did not question what went on around her.

Read through the glass of the ages I can understand better why this story was told—to show the devotion we are to have toward God and never to question our response once God has called us. For Abraham a renewal of the

covenant binding Maker and humans was restated. He was reassured that God treasured and valued him and that God would save him as God had spared his child. This was the message the leaders of the nation Israel sought to share with that nation through story and Psalm. Abraham went on to lead a life of service to God.

In Jesus we find reflections of God. Jesus presents a new way of seeing things for those who follow. He not only shows us the relationship we are to have to God, but also the relationship we are to have to others. Often people point to the symbol of the cross with its vertical bar representing our tie to God and the horizontal bar illustrating our ties to one another. If we choose to take up the cross and follow him, we will understand that we are not only a part of our Creator, but also a part of one another. As such, as our reading from Matthew shows, we are to be willing and generous supporters of one another without regard to who others are or where they are in life.

To be such supporters we need to set aside all feelings of inequality and simply do it—simply provide a helping hand, a comforting word, a calm and quiet understanding, a peaceful place that offers others a place of hospitality and acceptance. We all want to receive such unstinting support—as followers of Christ we are to supply it, also. We are to give of ourselves without any expectations of praise or thanks or reward. This can be difficult because we are human.

But we do know a better way, a way that constantly calls us. Some people do not like to be considered a “servant” to anyone. But if we consider the message that comes to us through and beyond our pages of scripture we discover that that is what life is all about. While our roles in life vary a great deal, our greatest goal is to do what it is we can to make our world a better place. We do this by setting aside the selfish ways of life we so enjoy and take up one that is full of sharing.

While there are times Jesus says we are “to give up our lives for our friends,” a very stiff requirement, in our reading the steps called for are far less rigorous. Welcoming others genuinely and providing hospitality is what is necessary. Through small but steady and consistent acts of kindness we do the work of God so carefully and clearly outlined by Jesus.

In that little hymn we just tried to sing, it is the gift of our presence for others who are struggling with life that is sung about... just the willingness to stand beside someone who feels dreadfully alone. There are times we all feel this way, I know only too well. But it is a reciprocal deal, we must not only stand beside those who are struggling, we must allow others into our lives enough that they will be able to act as loving servants to us, too. Sometimes we feel we must keep up such a brave front that our own neediness is never revealed. Those who truly love us and want to help us through life are those who do so quietly and unassumingly, always holding out a steady hand and always ready to set aside themselves and just plain listen to us.

That was the example set before us by Jesus to follow “til we’ve seen this journey through.”

-- *Amen*