

“Mt. Moriah”

Genesis 22:1-18

We continue our Lenten journey with one of the most challenging stories in Scripture. We know the story so well. Abraham is commanded by God Himself to take Isaac to a distant mountain (Mt. Moriah.) When they get there, Abraham prepares to go through with the order to offer up Isaac as a sacrifice.

The story continues with full drama. The boy is tied. Wood is placed on the altar. The knife is raised. Through his actions, Abraham is crying out, “Thy will be done.” Then suddenly God intervenes and stops him. God says to Abraham: “Now I know that you love Me. Don’t lay a hand on the boy. Untie him and offer up the ram caught in the thicket.”

It sounds like a T.V. drama. But there is more to this event than just drama. Moriah is one of the mountains we see on the road to Calvary. It is the place of incomplete sacrifice. Rather than seeing Moriah as a

dramatic rescue, the climactic, dramatic conclusion; we see it as only a part of the plot that foreshadows greater things to come.

Abraham's son is spared the knife at Moriah. Once again, the rule of substitution takes hold. When a sacrifice is demanded, a sacrifice must be made. It will be a ram, not Isaac that is sacrificed. There is a substitute to take his place. Abraham does not have to go through with offering his son as a bloody sacrifice. God provides a substitute.

But Abraham has been promised a Son who will not escape being offered on the altar. When God made His covenant with Abraham, not only did God promise that Abram would be the father of many nations, but God promised Abraham that his "Seed", his offspring, one of his descendants, would be a blessing to all nations. There would be another Son whose blood would be demanded by God. The offering will take place at Mt. Calvary. The altar will be a cross. And there will be no last minute escape. As the prophet Isaiah says, "It was the Lord's will to crush Him and cause Him to suffer" [Is. 53:10].

Our Father in heaven, who knows all things, fully knows as He orders Abraham to go to Moriah, what Abraham, as a father, is thinking. "My son,

my only son. The son I love.”

It is an act of mercy and compassion that causes God the Father to send the angel of the Lord to cry out: “Stop, Abraham. I know you love Me. Untie the boy.” It would have been a powerful message. It would have been an emphatic example that God has mastery over sin and death. It would have been an obvious foreshadowing of the resurrection of Jesus if God would have allowed Abraham to go through with killing Isaac, and then God raises him from the dead.

The promise of Isaac being the son through whom Abraham would be the father of a great nation would remain. God keeps His word. Neither death nor life can separate us from the love of God. God’s word is faithful; His promises are sure – even in the face of death.

What a powerful message that would have been. As Abraham raises the knife, he must believe that even if he strikes Isaac, God would raise him from the dead. Abraham said to his two servants, “Stay here with the donkey; I and the boy will go over there and worship and come again to you.” In the Hebrew, the language structure, the grammar implies that Abraham and the boy would come again. God had promised that it is

Isaac who is the son of the covenant. Isaac would live. Out of mercy and compassion, God does not let Abraham strike with his knife. God stops him and He provides a substitute sacrifice.

When it comes time for the only-begotten Son of God to be offered as the sacrifice to pay for the guilt of our sin – because a sacrifice is demanded, a sacrifice must be made. However, our Father in heaven will not be spared by a substituted sacrifice when it is His turn to offer His Son upon the altar of the cross. No voice is going to cry out: “Stop it!” There will be no dramatic rescue that will take His Son down from the cross. When He gets Him back from the cross, He will be dead, cold, and bloody.

What happened on Mt. Moriah stands as an incomplete sacrifice. Another mountain, Mt. Calvary, cries out for an offering that will not escape. When a sacrifice is demanded, a sacrifice must be made. Christ is that final sacrifice. Indeed, as Abraham said, God Himself will provide the Lamb for the offering. Christ, the Lamb of God, is the substitute for you, for me, and for all of God’s children. Amen.