

Let Go

Genesis 22:1-18

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Video and audio versions available online:

<https://relentless-love.org/sermons/let-go/>

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This document was prepared by Heather Eades using Peter's notes and the video version of this sermon. If you encounter any significant discrepancies or errors in this document, please let Heather know. Thank you!

This has been such a challenging week, which means it's been a very challenging year...all nine and a half days of it. And last year was pretty challenging too, in case you didn't notice.

Last Wednesday the election was certified, and a large portion of the country seems to think it was fraudulent. And yet, if the election hadn't been certified, an even larger proportion of the country would be convinced it was stolen. And of course, no one wants to lose, particularly the president. Even before the election he basically announced, "I cannot lose..." So, is it any wonder that he's been hanging on? Maybe we're all hanging on.

It's been hard for our country and hard for the institutional church. Some prophesied that Trump would be president, and God can't lose, right? Others thought we already lost by prophesying that Trump couldn't lose. And this past year it kind of seemed like we all lost.

For a time, it was even illegal to even gather as a group—that's tough on organized religion. I wondered if we were going to make it to 2021... But about 350,000 of our fellow Americans did not. It's been hard for the country, hard for the church, and hard for individuals.

Yesterday, I spoke at my cousin Tommy's funeral. He died from COVID right before Christmas Eve, leaving behind his wife and young daughter, and an uncertain future for those he loved. Many of you have lost loved ones, income, and maybe even some faith.

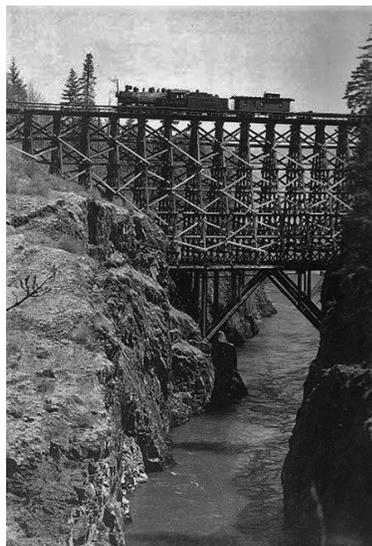
I often tell God: *"God, I feel like I'm barely hanging on..."*

This week, I kept thinking about a story that a Bavarian immigrant named Karl told the famous writer, William Moon, on a ferry ride across Lake Michigan many years ago.

When Karl was a boy of 14, he went fishing with a friend, and as it was late in the day, he and his friend decided to take a shortcut home. The shortcut was along a railroad track that crossed a series of narrow trestles over some deep mountain gorges.



They crossed the first two without incident, but by the time they got to the third, it was so dark they could barely see their feet. It was a moonless night. And so they held hands and began to feel their way across the gorge.



Over halfway across, they were suddenly blinded by a bright light. A locomotive had rounded a corner and was coming directly toward them! They turned, and tried to make their way back, hopping from one tie to the next tie in the dark... but they were not fast enough. At the last moment, all they could do was drop between the ties and hang from the timbers as the train rumbled by overhead.

When the train had finally passed, they tried to pull themselves up on to the track, but their arms were too tired—all they could do was hang on for dear life and yell for help. They hung in pitch black, yelling for help, and no one came. Karl prayed, and promised to be good if only God would deliver them... for he couldn't hang on much longer.

Maybe you feel like you can't hang on much longer. Maybe we all feel like we can't hang on much longer. And we wonder, *Dear God, what do you want us to do? What are you trying to say? How are we to have faith when all that's good is slipping away, and we don't think we can hang on much longer? How do we have faith?*

Well in Scripture, the Father of Faith is a man named Abraham. This week, I kept thinking of that train trestle and those boys and Abraham...so, I'd like to chat a bit about him this morning. But before we do, let's pray:

Prayer

Father, we pray that this morning we would hear your Word. Maybe even better, Lord, could we see your Word? And believe your Word? And like Chris talked about last week—could we incarnate your Word? Help us to preach in Jesus's name. Amen.

Message

And now, keep your eyes closed for just a minute more... I want you to just picture someone you love dearly... It could be your mom, your dad, a friend, your husband, or wife...

For me, I naturally think of my children; I think of Jonathan, my first-born son... Susan and I tried for a year, and she could not seem to get pregnant, but then Jon. Jon is a miracle and the answer to our prayers.

So imagine that person.... Thank God for that person....because that person is a miraculous blessing from God the Father.

And now imagine that God spoke to you about that person, saying, "I want you to bind that person, then place that person on an altar of wood, slit their throat, and offer them to me by fire." Would you do it?

Now I know that everything within you recoils at just the suggestion, and you want to scream: *"My God would never ask such a thing!"*

Well, demons will ask such things... I know this to be true.

But suppose you bound the demons in Jesus's name, and you knew it was the Lord talking to you...

Would you do it?

You say, "God would never ask such a thing..." And maybe you're right; he would not ask such a thing of you, or at least not ask it in that way. But God would ask such a thing, for he did ask such a thing. He asked it of Abraham.

Genesis 22:1 · "After these things God tested Abraham and 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 of which I shall tell you."

Now, I have wonderful Christian friends, even famous Christian friends, that preach that, *because God is Relentless Love, surely God did not actually ask this of Abraham; surely this is man's perception of God, as God condescends to the limited understanding of men, in a pre-enlightened Bronze Age society; surely Jesus has shown us the true heart of God our Father...*

The only problem with that is that Jesus and the New Testament authors referred to Abraham as the "Father of Faith," who truly rejoiced in Jesus a few thousand years before he was placed in that manger (John 8:56-57).

If you jettison Abraham and Isaac, it seems you jettison God the Father and God the Son.

Now, it's entirely true that in Leviticus, God forbids the Israelites from sacrificing their children to Molech. And that in Jeremiah, to those who had sacrificed their children to idols in the Valley of Gehenna, God says, "Such a thing never entered my mind." But what he asks of Abraham—to offer his son to him—must be profoundly different than offering a child to Molech in the Valley of Gehenna, although to some, it might appear to be just the same.

So, of course, some would say, "God would never ask such a thing..." But unless you're willing to throw out massive portions of Scripture, it seems to me... *He did.*

Genesis 22:1 · "After these things God tested Abraham..."

Why would God need to test Abraham? To learn something that he did not know.... Or so that Abraham might know something that he had only begun to learn?

When it's all over, God says this: "Because you have done this, I will surely bless you." But God had already told Abraham decades before that he would bless him. So, God will bless Abraham because God had freely chosen Abraham to make this choice—this choice called faith. Abraham was chosen to choose; he was predestined to make a good choice... and he discovered this on Mount Moriah.

Genesis 22:1 · "After these things God tested Abraham..."

Not like a math teacher tests sixth graders, but like an artisan tests gold and turns it into priceless treasure.

Genesis 22:1 · "After these things God tested Abraham..."
After what things?

- After God called Abraham and made an everlasting covenant with Abraham that in his seed (that's Isaac), all the nations of the world would be blessed. *After that*, and...
- After Abraham had sacrificed everything and journeyed to Canaan, sojourned in Egypt, fought battles with kings, and basically pimped his wife trying to save their tails, all in the hope of receiving the promised blessing. *After that*, and...
- After waiting 10 years and impregnating Hagar (Sarah's Servant), trying to produce the promised blessing... 'cause God wasn't delivering the blessing.
- After Isaac, the promised blessing, was finally born 25 years after the promise was made when Abraham was a hundred years old and Sarah was 90.
- After God caused Abraham to put all of his faith, hope, and love into Isaac.
- After all these things, God told Abraham to sacrifice Isaac: the promised seed, the miraculous blessing—whose name literally means “laughter.”

Because we're Biblically Illiterate Modern Americans who have been fed a bunch of bad theology—particularly in regard to Jesus's death on the cross—we tend to think that sacrificed things are hated things. But in Scripture, sacrificed things are usually the most beloved of all things. Particularly the burnt offering—the *Olah* in Hebrew; it wasn't the sin offering, guilt offering, or scapegoat; it was a sacred gift given to the Creator.

“Sacrifice your son, your life, your past, present, and future, your control...”

“Sacrifice everything that you perceive to be good on a mountain in Moriah...”

According to scholars “Moriah” means something like “Vision of Yahweh...”ⁱ So, What kind of horrific vision is this?

³ So Abraham rose early in the morning, saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him, and his son Isaac. And he cut the wood [ates] for the burnt offering... [That word *ates* is also translated “tree,” or even, “gallows.” It's the word a Hebrew would use to describe a cross.]

You may remember that Abraham first had a vision of God in Genesis 12:6 at “the Oak (that is the tree) of Moreh.” So scholars suspect that the name Moriah reflects that vision. “Moriah” refers to a vision of God at a tree on a mountain.

[So Abraham] **cut the wood for the burnt offering and arose and went to the place of which God had told him [Mount Moriah]. ⁴ On the third day Abraham lifted up his eyes and saw the place from afar. ⁵ Then Abraham said to his young men [nahar], “Stay here with the donkey; I and the boy [nahar] will go over there and worship and come again to you.” ⁶ And Abraham took the wood [ates] of the burnt offering and laid it on Isaac his son. And he took in his hand the fire and the knife. So they went both of them together.**

Isaac is called a *nahar*, and Abraham has him carry enough wood on his back up this mountain, to make a fire that would reduce a grown ram to ashes. Isaac is not a little boy; ancient rabbis argued that he was 37.ⁱⁱ He's at least a teenager, and probably in his early thirties... like Jesus.

⁷ And Isaac said to his father Abraham, “My father!” And he said, “Here I am, my son.” He said, “Behold, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?” ⁸ Abraham said, “God will provide for himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son.” So they went both of them together.

⁹When they came to the place of which God had told him, Abraham built the altar there and laid the wood in order and bound Isaac his son and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. ¹⁰Then Abraham reached out his hand and took the knife to slaughter his son.

He's not waiting for another lamb, is he? Is this insanity?

It's not an obscure and insignificant little passage.

- St. Paul wrote, "Abraham is the father of all who believe." (Romans 4:11)
- And this is the faith that's "reckoned as righteousness." (James 2:23; Romans 4:5)
- This is why Abraham is called the "Friend of God." (James 2:23)
- From here on out, when God identifies himself to folks, He says, "I'm the God of Abraham." (Exodus 3:6; etc., etc.)

Is this insanity?

Abraham is sacrificing everything he judges to be good...and all his knowledge of how to make things good.

"Through Isaac all the nations of the world will be blessed," says God, "Now Abraham, sacrifice his life on a tree on Mt. Moriah—it will be a vision of me."

Perhaps no modern thinker has paid as much attention to Abraham as the young Danish philosopher, Soren Kierkegaard. Kierkegaard taught that every person operates in one of three spheres.ⁱⁱⁱ And Abraham on Mt. Moriah is the paradigm for life in the third sphere.

Kierkegaard argued that the fundamental question for all people is, "How can I be saved; how can I avoid death, and obtain *eternal life*?" And he taught that in each stage (or sphere), a person seeks this salvation in a different way.

The first sphere is the aesthetic sphere.^{iv}

- The aesthetic seeks salvation through pleasure. And that pleasure can be very refined: the arts, Beethoven, philosophy, science, culture, and religion.
- The God of the aesthetic is beautiful, attractive, and intriguing.
- The aesthetic is a connoisseur and therefore a spectator, not a participant.
- He seeks to possess the good, but is never possessed *by* the Good.

Bono used to sing, "Every artist is a cannibal, every poet is a thief; they all kill their inspiration and sing about the grief."

- The aesthetic wants to know *about* God; but refuses to be known *by* God.
- He admires God, like Judas admired Jesus, and so tried to consume Jesus.
- He admires the Word of God, like Eve admired the fruit of the tree, seeing that it was "good for food and a delight to the eyes." And so she took it and ate it.

But Moriah was not appetizing to Abraham on this day...

So, he must have forsaken his appetite for the fruit, in order to make his offering on the mountain that day. He surrendered his desire for good to the source of all good, who is the Good.

The next stage or sphere is the Ethical sphere.

- The Ethical man seeks salvation through his will, rather than his appetites.
- He thinks salvation comes through “knowledge of the Good,” with which you can make yourself good.
- Salvation comes through formulas, rules, and laws—be it moral principles, social laws, or the Ten Commandments: Do not covet. Do not murder... your son. That’s how you save yourself... how you “save your soul,” thinks the ethicist.^v
- He listens to the sermon and asks, “What can I learn from this? What principles can I take from the Word of God and apply to my life?”
- Like Judas he comments, “What a waste; this perfume could’ve been sold... and given to the poor.” He is unable to worship.

The Ethical man desires God, the way that Eve desired the fruit of the tree when she saw that “*it was to be desired to make one wise.*”

I doubt that Abraham felt wise as he climbed Mt. Moriah. He was sacrificing his knowledge of the Good to the One who is Good. He was sacrificing his control of the blessing to the One who blesses.

Is that insanity?

Well, the Bible calls it “faith.”

Desire and Pride, tax collectors and Pharisees, take the good, consume the good, and use the good in the first two stages, according to Kierkegaard. But it’s faith that surrenders the good back to God in the third stage.

“We’re justified by faith, (made right by faith)” writes Paul. (Romans 3:28)

“Therefore... present your bodies as a living sacrifice.” (Romans 12:1)

Abraham wasn’t just sacrificing Isaac; he was sacrificing his self: his desire, his knowledge, his psyche, his soul, his world.

And what about Isaac?

We think of Isaac as a little child; but Isaac is clearly a young man. If Isaac is 33 years old, that means Abraham would be 133 years old. And there’s clearly no way that old Abraham could bind Isaac, place him upon the wood, and offer him as a gift to God... if Isaac doesn’t agree to offer himself to God.

In other words, no one takes Isaac’s life from him, but Isaac lays it down freely and of his own accord on a tree on Mt. Moriah. He chooses to do what he sees his father doing. And that’s faith.

And where did he get that faith? He must have gotten it from looking into his father’s eyes, just as Abraham must have gotten it from looking into God the Father’s eyes.

When my daughter was about two, she cracked her head open on the fireplace, and I took her to get stitches. *It was hell.* To keep her from moving, they had to bind her and tie her to a papoose board, while men in green masks poked needles in her head that was already bleeding. And worst of all, Daddy drove her to this place.

A month or two later it happened again. But this time I said, “Elizabeth, the doctor says they won’t have to tie you down if you can trust me; just look into my eyes, and *hold still*.”

“OK, Daddy,” she said.

I got down real close to that gorgeous, little terrified face. I remember her eyes locked onto mine, as if they were reaching into my soul and grabbing hold of my faith—that I loved her and that I had decided that this was, in fact, good.

Whenever I would give my kids a gift, I remember they would look at the gift—the pleasure. And when I would give my kids the law, they would look at themselves and then look away from me in shame. But when my kids would suffer, they would look into my eyes, hang on to my heart, and let go of their own need for control, their fear.

Elizabeth looked into my eyes and put faith in my judgment; although it hurt and she did not understand, she surrendered control and she was still. She put her faith in me, or more accurately, I put my faith in her. She didn’t need to be bound by external constraints. She was constrained by her faith in my Love. And the gift that we received was each other: Heaven in the midst of Hell.

It didn’t feel good, and it didn’t seem good, but Abraham surrendered to the One who is good. And Isaac freely surrendered to his Father.

And that’s Faith.

That’s the thing that Adam lacked in the Garden of Eden: Faith that God is Good, and that his Word is Life.

¹⁰ Then Abraham reached out his hand and took the knife to slaughter 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, seeing you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me.” ¹³ And Abraham lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, behind him was a ram [that’s a grown lamb... about 33 years old], caught in a thicket by his horns^{vi}. And Abraham went and took the ram and offered it up as a burnt offering instead of his son. ¹⁴ So Abraham called the name of that place, “The Lord will provide”; as it is said to this day, “On the mount of the Lord it shall be provided.”

What will be provided? And what mountain are we talking about?

According to Orthodox Jews, Moriah is also Eden. And in Eden, there was a tree, (an *ates*): the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, and in the same spot, the Tree of Life. Two trees that looked the same in one spot... Or one tree that functions as two, depending on how you took it or received it.



Figure 1 "Mystery of the Fall and Redemption of Man" by Giovanni da Modena (1420)

On the tree is the Good in flesh; Jesus said, "God alone is Good." Jesus is the Good in flesh. And on the tree is the Life; Jesus said, "I am the life."

And on the Mountain, there is a stone called "the foundation stone." The Jews say it is the place that Adam was made... or is made.

It's also the place where Abraham prepared to sacrifice Isaac.
 Which is also the place where David offered to sacrifice himself to save Jerusalem.
 Which is also the place where Solomon built the temple.
 Which is also the place where the Jews placed the Ark of the Covenant and made sacrifices and offerings to Yahweh.
 Which is next to the place where Jesus was crucified on a tree in a garden—the Garden of Mt. Calvary... that is Mt. Moriah... that is Eden.

If you ask, "Why would God have Abraham do such a thing?" let me remind you that God had already done such a thing for Abraham and all humanity. Jesus, the only begotten Son of God, was slain from the foundation of the world for the Love of You.^{vii}

Abraham was called the friend of God, for on Mt. Moriah, he knew God's heart. Jesus said, "Abraham saw my day and was glad. Before Abraham was, I am." (John 8:56-58)

Abraham felt a little of what God felt as he gave himself to each of us. It was evil that we took his life on the tree. It was the revelation of the Good that he gave his life on the tree.

So, what was provided on Mt. Moriah?
 We, can only begin to point... But:

(1.) *“Knowledge of the Good.”*

God is Good and that he gives his heart to us is the revelation of the Good that is himself—Jesus from the *“bosom of the Father.”* (John 1:18 RSV)

If Jesus is God in flesh, He is the Good in flesh, like the blood in a grape. “In him are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.” (Colossians 2:3)

Jesus is the fruit of knowledge, hanging on the tree in the Garden of Eden that is Mt. Moriah, the Mountain of the Lord.

Do you see? Abraham is returning the Good to the one who is Good and is the author of *all* good—he’s surrendering the blessing. And yet, in the same moment, God is giving the blessing by providing the lamb—the lamb that is “slain from the foundation of the world” and is now, also, the Promised Seed in Abraham and in Isaac that is returning.

It makes your head spin, but we know that “In this is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us and gave his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.” (1 John 4:10) That’s the Good.

And in this is eternal Life, Jesus said, “That they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.” (John 17:3)

Do you see? The Good in flesh that hangs on the tree in the Garden of Eden is the Life. And it’s the Good in flesh and the Life that Abraham now returns on the mountain. Even as God gives the Good in flesh and the Life as Abraham returns it. It’s like a never-ending communion of Life... that is the Good.

- Abraham is surrendering the blessing to the one who blesses; he is blessing the Blesser, and in this way, he is infinitely and endlessly blessed.
- Abraham is surrendering his good to the one who is the Good... and here Abraham becomes the Good... the very image of God.
- Abraham is surrendering his life to the Author of Life... and it’s here that Abraham receives the life, as his endless life—it’s eternal life.

So, what is provided on the mountain?

- (1.) The Knowledge of Good (even if it may kill you in the process), and
- (2.) The Life—the Resurrection and the Life.

When Adam took the knowledge of good and evil, he took the life. And the life died, the blessing died, and yet that blessing is a seed. Now, Abraham returns to the tree, surrenders the seed; he surrenders everything that he perceives to be good; he surrenders the promised seed that is his life. He surrenders Isaac, and—lo and behold—Isaac lives.

Do you see? Through sacrifice—just by lifting the knife—Abraham surrenders the fruit of the tree in the middle of the Garden... and then the miracle: in the very same moment, he receives it back.

Hebrews 11:17 · By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises was in the act of offering up his only son, ¹⁸of whom it was said, “Through Isaac shall

your offspring [sperma: seed] be named.” ¹⁹ He considered that God was able even to raise him from the dead, from which, figuratively speaking, he did receive him back.

Faith is the decision to lose your life and find it, because you know that God is Good: God is Love.

Faith is sacrifice, in the name of Love and for Love—it is Love.

Faith is bleeding—and the life is in the blood.

When one person bleeds, it looks like a man crucified on a tree in a garden.

When two people bleed for each other it looks like a great marriage.

When all people bleed for all people, it is actually a body, and a kingdom, the kingdom of heaven—every soul constantly loses life and finds life... and that’s the Good.

Faith is the sanity of God; Faith is the logic of Love; Faith is the Judgment of God in us.

And where does Faith come from? Well, it comes from the tree in the middle of the garden at the edge of time and eternity, and found in the depths of the temple that is your soul. Faith, in Abraham, is the Promised Blessing in Abraham, the Lamb who was slain in Abraham, the Sperma (the Seed) in Abraham.

It’s the thing that Adam lacked before the fall, when God saw that the Adam was alone—It’s the judgment of God in Abraham, it’s righteousness in Abraham; it finishes Abraham in the very image and likeness of God. It had been in Abraham at least since God called his name, but now it was rising within Abraham... and making all things new.

¹⁵ And the angel of the Lord [that’s the God/man, Jesus] called to Abraham a second time from heaven ¹⁶ and said, “By myself I have sworn, declares the Lord, because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son [and that is also Jesus, the promised seed in Isaac], ¹⁷ I will surely bless you, and I will surely multiply your offspring [seed—that is himself] as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore. And your offspring [seed] shall possess the gate of his enemies [the gates of hell will not stand against him, in us], ¹⁸ and in your offspring [seed] shall all the nations [that’s Sodom, Israel, Iran, the United States and you] of the earth be blessed, because you have obeyed my voice [myself, saying, “offer me on Mt. Moriah”].”^{viii}

[Image: Slide on screen with the following question and numbered answers]

So, what is provided at the tree on the mountain of the Lord?

- (1.) The knowledge of the Good.
- (2.) The Life
- (3.) Faith... in Love: The Judgment of God.
- (4.) Everything... including you.

See? You *have* to go to heaven eventually, because God promised you to Abraham—it’s not just Lazarus in the bosom of Abraham; it’s you. Abraham inherits Lazarus (*Eliezer* in Hebrew) his Gentile servant, and Judah, who for a time must weep and gnash his teeth in hades, and he inherits you.

Abraham inherits you, and you inherit Abraham and all things with him, for “all things are yours... and you are Christ’s and Christ is God’s.” (1 Corinthians 3:21-22)

But, make no mistake, it’s just exactly as Jesus said immediately after he revealed to his disciples that he would bear the wood up Mt. Moriah and be offered up for the sins of the world.

He said, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross [his wood] and follow me. ²⁵ For whoever would save his life [*pyche*] will lose it, but whoever loses his life [*psyche*] for my sake will find it. ²⁶ For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits [*his psyche*] his soul?”

I hope you pray for our president... we’re commanded to do that .Pray that he would learn to lose. Pray that for everyone in power. For we just learned that you cannot win unless you lose.

You cannot win... unless you lose... because life is not a possession; it’s a communion! In fact, nothing good is a possession. And now you know...

And you will only come to live when you trust that you are the possession of the Good: God is Good, and his Word is Life... And now you know.

Actually you all are gaining this knowledge right now in this fallen world, but I suspect that you already know:

You can’t win at marriage, unless you learn to lose.
You can’t win at friendship, unless you choose to lose.
You cannot live, until you learn to Love—and *in this is Love*, that you would lose so another might win, that you would sacrifice.

So, would God ask such a thing of us?

Well, I think it’s the only thing that God does ask of us; it’s love.

So, would God ask us to sacrifice a child like Abraham went to sacrifice Isaac?

Well, no. Jesus was sacrificed once and for all... so *no*. ...And yet, yes, for faith in us is Christ Jesus in us.^{ix}

I’ve found that people who have never lost a child are terribly offended by Genesis 22. And yet, there are people (like, my friend, Mike^x) who have lost a child, who are infinitely blessed by Genesis 22.

They know that they didn’t lose their child to a tornado or disease, chance, chaos, the void or the devil; they’ve surrendered their child to their faithful Creator. They know that the Lord came for that child, and they know they will receive that child back.

Abraham received Isaac back that day... and yet he would still have to surrender him and all things with him; Abraham still had to die.

One day you will die.... One day, we will each have to surrender all things on Mt. Moriah... And that day could be this day, and every day...

You know what else is provided on the Mountain of the Lord?

[Image on screen showing previous numbered list with additional number.]

(5.) Laughter. The name Isaac means “Laughter—he laughs.”

Soren Kierkegaard wrote that laughter marks the transition from the first and second spheres into the third sphere.^{xi}

In the words of Charles Shultz, “humor is the proof of faith.”^{xii}

Genuine laughter is evidence that you have died to your own ego—Your ego is your desperate conviction that you must possess the good, and make yourself Good in order to live Life; that you must win to live, when, in fact, you can only live once you’ve learned to die, with Jesus.

- Laughter is evidence that you have stopped believing you must possess the Good and have come to believe that the Good has always possessed you.
- Laughter is evidence that you no longer believe you can justify yourself, but that you have always been justified.
- Laughter is evidence that you’ve come to trust that you cannot save yourself, but that you have been saved from the foundation of the world.
- Laughter is letting go.

[Image: on the screen shows the previous image in the sermon of the trestle, and the train passing over the gorge.]

Well anyway, as I was saying, Karl and his fishing buddy hung from the train trestle in the dark... as that freight train rumbled over their head. They saved themselves, but then they lacked the strength to pull themselves up onto the track. They hung there for a long time, crying for help. They hung on for dear life, terrified of losing all good things.

They hung alone in the darkness, feet dangling into the inky black void... And then, they saw a light, and heard a voice. At first, Karl thought it was God...and in a way, maybe it was.

The voice said, “What are you boys doing, making such a commotion and hanging here from these timbers?”

The man then turned his lantern from their faces to their feet. They looked down at their feet, and suddenly they realized that between the ground and their feet was the gigantic distance of ten inches.

They let go. ...And decades later, Karl was still laughing.

Do you understand why we come here every Sunday, every Sabbath?
To let Go.

This is Mt. Moriah. (Peter comes to the communion table.) This is the Tree. (Peter puts his hand on cross.) And this is the Blessing: the Good and the Life. (Peter takes the bread.) You don’t “possess” it; you must surrender it and discover that it’s always been given to you: Jesus.

Communion

He took bread and broke it saying, “This is my body given to you.” And in the same manner, he took the cup saying, “This is the covenant in my blood; the life is in the blood. Take and drink and do this in remembrance of me—the blessing.”

So, if you’ve been feeling like you just can’t hang on... then *let go*.

(But let me quickly say, that doesn’t mean suicide. Suicide is not letting go; but hanging on and seizing control. “Letting go” is like a leap in the dark, called faith.)

And if you say, “But Peter, if I let go, I might die.”

Well sure...If you *don’t* let go, you’ll remain dead, terrified, and alone in outer darkness. But if you *do* let go, you’ll fall into the arms of your Father, the Ground of all Being—he’s less than ten inches away from you right now.

So we invite you to come to the table. Come take communion. And before you take it:

- *Confess your sins*: That’s basically anything you think you possess or control; it’s the Good that you’ve taken and the Life you’ve stolen. [It’s the thing that’s making you anxious]
- *Confess your sins and believe God’s Grace*: God constantly gives you your life, and all good things... “all things are yours... you are Christ’s and Christ is God’s.”

It was a snake, and then your ego, that convinced you otherwise. So, Repent! That’s what you’re doing as you ingest the Logic of Love (the Body broken and Blood shed).

Benediction

So listen, you just prayed to teach us to love like you love. You were singing that in the song. “Teach us to love. Teach us joy. Teach us life. Give us faith.” So just close your eyes and look into the eyes of Jesus. And he says, “If you’ve seen me, you’ve seen the Father.” You see, you’re looking into the eyes of the Father and you’re asking, “Teach us to love like you love.” And this is his answer: “I am.” You know people say, “We’ve all been forced to make sacrifices during this time.” In hell, they say: “Yep,”—and that’s a bad thing. In heaven, they say: “Yep,”—and that’s a good thing. That’s life. That’s the essence of life.

So, the next time you’re like me, and you pray, “God, I’m losing it,” listen closely, and I think you’ll hear Jesus weeping...because he feels the pain of that. But listen even closer and I think you’ll hear all of heaven giggling. You are losing it. You can’t hang on to the good and the life. But, lo and behold, the Good and the Life has always been hanging on to you. And when you come to know it, that’s life. And that’s really good news.

Believe the Gospel.

In Jesus’s name, amen.

Endnotes

ⁱ The name “Moriah” appears to be related to the “Oak of Moreh” in Genesis 12:9. This is the tree at which God appears to Abraham when he arrives in Canaan and promises the blessing—“to your seed I will give this land.” (See: International Standard Bible Dictionary, “Moriah,” Eerdmans 1986)

ⁱⁱ They Argue that the attempted sacrifice was the death of Sarah, described in the next chapter of Genesis. She died at 127, which would make Isaac 37, and Abraham 137.

ⁱⁱⁱ For a nice summary of these ideas see: Tony Campolo, *Partly Right* (Word Books, Waco TX, 1985) pp.85-103

^{iv} The Aesthetic: Kierkegaard describes this person in his book *Either/or*. He seduces a woman with wit, style, and culture but is incapable of commitment. He wants to know about her but will not know her. She's dead to him.

^v The ethical man sings the songs the way he recites the *Pledge of Allegiance*, learns the Boy Scouts oath, or memorizes the directions to the microwave

^{vi} “His horns” is his strength. God is Love. And nothing is stronger than Love. God is caught by his Love for you...

^{vii} Jesus “from the bosom of the father,” the Angel of Yahweh, the “Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world,” the Good in flesh, the Life from God, the Promised blessing, “Jesus Christ and him crucified” on the tree in the Garden is how you are made in the image of God.

^{viii} He is the voice. And so he commands us to offer him on Mt. Calvary... and in this way all the nations of the world are blessed. I think it’s what we do every time we break the bread and pour the wine.

^{ix} A pastor I know recalls a Sunday morning Bible study at his church when the text under consideration was Genesis 22. God commands Abraham to take his son Isaac and offer him in sacrifice on Mount Moriah.

After the group read the passage, the pastor offered some historical background on this period in salvation-history, including the prevalence of child sacrifice among the Canaanites. The group listened in awkward silence.

The pastor asked, “But what does this story mean to us?”

A middle-aged man spoke up. “I’ll tell you the meaning this story has for me. I’ve decided that me and my family are looking for another church.”

The pastor was astonished, “What? Why?”

“Because,” the man said, “when I look at that God, the God of Abraham, I feel I’m near a real God, not the sort of dignified, businesslike, Rotary Club God we chatter about here on Sunday mornings. Abraham’s God could blow a man to bits, give and then take a child, ask for everything from a person, and then want more. I want to know that God.”

- Brennan Manning, *The Ragamuffin Gospel*, p. 37.

^x Hear Mike’s story: <https://relentless-love.org/sermons/god-taking-break/>

^{xi} Like Schopenhauer, Søren Kierkegaard saw humor as based on incongruity and as philosophically significant. In his discussion of the “three spheres of existence,” (the three existential stages of life—the aesthetic, the ethical, and the religious), he discusses humor and its close relative, irony. Irony marks the boundary between the aesthetic and the ethical spheres, while humor marks the boundary between the ethical and religious spheres. “Humor is the last stage of existential awareness before faith” (1846 [1941], 448, 259). The person with a religious view of life is likely to cultivate humor, he says, and Christianity is the most humorous view of life in world history ([JJP], Entries 1681–1682).

Kierkegaard (1846 [1941], 459–468) locates the essence of humor, which he calls “the comical,” in a disparity between what is expected and what is experienced...

--The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, “Philosophy of Humor”

<https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/humor/>

^{xii} “Humor is a proof of faith.” -Charles M. Schulz in *Chicken Soup for the Christian Soul*, “No Excuse Sunday,” p. 228.