

Trinity 7 (2020)

Faith is a journey, not a destination.

Those of us who have been here at St. Luke's for any length of time know the truth of these words.

Every time we have seemed to have arrived; God has beckoned us to keep moving.

I remember the first service in this building, now over a quarter of century ago. Years of praying, dreaming and collecting aluminium cans (the proceeds from which went into the building fund) had paid off. We could at least rest. We had arrived!

No so, though. Not too many years later buying the two lots next door became a priority. After a number of heated discussions and with the sacrificial giving of many: We got the property. Now, we could rest.

But it wasn't to be. A consensus soon developed that this building needed to be enlarged. And so, it was in 2011. We could rest.

But not so. There was mortgage that had to be paid off. Last year, again through the sacrificial giving of many, this debt was retired. At long last, we could sit back and rest.

Then 2020 came rushing in like a hurricane and with it the challenge of the pandemic. At that time, life-streaming our services on the internet became both a necessity and a priority.

Temporary equipment was cobbled together, and thanks to our Junior Warden Jim Noblett – God's man for the hour -- the system was up and running the first Sunday we were out of the church.

Now, it has become apparent that internet broadcasting needs to continue even after Covid-19 is history.

The new mountain to be climb is installing sophisticated cameras and transmission equipment that will raise the bar. The cost of the proposed system is around \$12,000. If you would like to help please do speak to me after the service!

Once this goal is met, we can sit down and rest, right? /// Probably not.
Faith, as we have seen, **is a journey, not a destination.**

Abraham at whose life we have been looking over the past five or so weeks, I think, would sign onto this proposition.

As this morning's Old Testament reading opens, the patriarch had arrived at one of these plateaus of ease.

After years of moving, he was in the land of promise and at peace with his Canaanites neighbours.

Moreover, Abraham was doing well financially . . . lots of herds of livestock. He and Sarah were not having to live from Social Security cheque to Social Security cheque.

But, most importantly of all, the heir for which he had so long waited had arrived and was by this time a big boy.

Young Isaac was the apple of his dad's eye. In today's passage, we are told Abraham loved him.

What is significant about this statement is that it is the first time in the Bible we find the concept of love expressed.

At this point, you almost feel like rounding off Abraham's story with the words, "And the 'Abrahams' live happily ever after."

No so though. With Genesis 22, comes yet another mountain to be climb.

God does the unthinkable. He commands Abraham to sacrifice his one and only son in order to prove his fidelity.

Further, we are told that Abraham responded to this test in trusting obedience.

From where did this trusting obedience come?

I want to suggest it came from having undergone many earlier, smaller tests.

From these tests, Abraham had learned to trust God, yes, even with that one he loved above all else, his son.

He believed verily God was going to do what He promised . . . raise up to him through Isaac a family that would exceed in number the stars of heaven.

More than that, if necessary, Abraham believed that God could raise the dead. After all, God had already done something very much like this when He had brought back life to Sarah's dead womb and had allowed her to conceive Isaac.

Small challenges, you see, enabled him (and I want to suggest us) to meet larger ones. I wonder if you have found that to be true in your life?

One who has had to face no challenges is of all men most to be pitied.

The young person, for example, who is given everything, who never has had to struggle, is often ill equipped for life, is an emotional cripple. In a way, he or she has been cheated.

The tests God sends, therefore, should not to be resented but embraced.

They are not for our destruction, but for our salvation. They are to stretch our faith and ultimately to prepare us for heaven.

“It is good for me that I have been in trouble, that I may learn thy statutes,” says the Psalmist (119:71).

Why not look back in your life and see if you can find some examples of what I am talking about . . . tests which made you a stronger, a better and perhaps a more compassionate person?

Give thanks to God for these, but also, as you do, thank Him for walking with you through these challenges, for never forsaking you.

As you look back, I think you will find what Abraham found: **The God who tests also provides.**

Before I pass on, allow me to say a word about human sacrifice. All around Abraham were people who practiced it as part of their religious cult.

The ‘test’ God put before Abraham should in no wise be construed as an endorsement of this practice. Quite the opposite. On Mount Mariah God put a giant

X mark across it. God Himself would provide the sacrifice that would take away the sin of the world.

Fast forward 2000 years and on the same mount you will find God doing this very thing
. . . offering up His Son whom He loved for the sin of the world, thus making it possible for us to be reconciled to Him.

One final thought. The test God put before Abraham that day is a universal one. God wants to know what's No. 1 in your life, in my life. So, He says: Throw that thing down. Surrender it.

Why does God ask us to do this? To break us? To make us miserable? No. It is so he can give that thing back, cleansed, restored and re-invigorated with His power.

It is the paradox Jesus set before the people of His day:

“For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it.”

I wonder what is your ‘Isaac’? The person, place or thing you value most? Whatever it is cast it down. /// What will God do? We don’t know. Prepare to be surprised.

All to Jesus I surrender,
All to Him I freely give;
I will ever love and trust Him,
In His presence daily live.
I surrender all . . .

Let this be your prayer this morning if you would know the blessing of God’s peace.