



FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Fourth Sunday After Pentecost

June 28, 2020

Anglican Parish of Raymond Terrace
www.stjohnsraymondterrace.org

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Pray

May I speak to you in the name of GOD – Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen



In the passage from Genesis, we read about GOD testing Abraham. Isaac is a sign that GOD has kept His promise. To be willing to sacrifice Isaac is to trust that the GOD who kept His promise can do it again. It is a test – not to trip him or watch him fall, but to deepen his capacity to obey GOD and thus develop his character. Just as fire refines ore to extract precious metals, GOD refines us through difficult circumstances. When we are tested, we can complain, or we can try to see how GOD is stretching us to develop our character. That morning, Abraham began one of the greatest acts of obedience in recorded history. He travelled 80km to Mount Moriah near the site of Jerusalem. Over the years, Abraham had learned many tough lessons about the importance of obeying GOD. This time his

obedience was prompt and complete. Obeying GOD is often a struggle because it may mean giving up something we genuinely want. We should not expect our obedience to GOD to be easy or to come naturally. Why did GOD ask to sacrifice Isaac when He condemned such acts as a terrible sin? GOD did not want Isaac to die but He wanted Abraham to sacrifice Isaac in his heart so it would be clear that Abraham loved GOD more than he loved his promised and long-awaited son. GOD was testing Abraham – and throughout this difficult experience, Abraham strengthened his commitment to obey GOD. He also learned about GOD's ability to provide. It is always difficult to let go of what we deeply love. This was shown to me in spades yesterday at the 2 funerals which took place here at St John's. Both were very emotional funerals. Abraham was asked to sacrifice the child for which he and Sarah had waited a lifetime. We know from our Christian experience that when we give to GOD what He asks, He returns to us far more

than we could dream – the blessings far outweigh the sacrifices.

There is a parallel between the ram offered on the altar as a substitute for Isaac and CHRIST offered on the cross as a substitute for us. Whereas GOD stopped Abraham from sacrificing his son, GOD did not spare His own Son, JESUS, from dying on the cross. If JESUS had lived, the rest of humankind would have died. GOD sent His only Son to die for us so that we could be spared from the eternal death we deserve and instead, receive eternal life.

Sometimes all we need to do is talk over a problem with a friend to help put it in perspective. In our psalm, the phrase “How Long” occurs 4 times in the first 2 verses – indicating the depth of David’s distress. David expressed his feelings to GOD and found strength. By the end of his prayer, he was able to profess hope and trust in GOD. Through prayer we can express our feelings and talk our problems out with GOD. He helps

us gain the right perspective, and this gives us peace.

[Habakkuk 3: 17-19]

Last week, Paul taught us that BY NO MEANS should we continue sinning so that grace may abound. This week we are told in verse 12: ¹²Therefore, do not let sin exercise dominion in your mortal bodies, to make you obey their passions. How can we do this?

We can take the following steps:

1. Identify our personal weaknesses
2. Recognise that things tempt us
3. Stay away from sources of temptation
4. Practice self-restraint
5. Consciously invest our time in good habits and services
6. Lean on GOD's strength and grace

When we were under the law, sin was our master – and the law does not justify us or help us overcome sin. But now we are bound to CHRIST, He is our Master, and He gives us the power to do good rather than evil.

Paul makes it clear: excuses like “the devil made me do it” will no longer work. The power of sin has been broken. The Christian is no longer enslaved to it. After dying with CHRIST in baptism, we are free from the lordship of sin – free to do what is good – what GOD wants us to do. And this is the problem. As human creatures, we are free only to live within the framework of some lordship – either of GOD or of sin – there is no neutral ground. The choice is not absolute slavery or absolute freedom but slavery to which lord or ruling power. That is the burden of Paul’s discussion here. The situation is a bit like someone being released from prison. While in prison, that person must obey the prison rules. When they come to the end of their sentence, they are no longer in prison and become free to obey society’s rules. We are free to follow and obey our new master; but it is still possible to fall back under the lordship of the old one as well. It is impossible to be neutral. Every person has a master – either GOD or sin. As Christians, we are not people who cannot

sin – but people who are no longer slaves to sin because we belong to GOD. The currency of sin is eternal death. The currency of CHRIST is eternal life – new life with GOD that begins here on earth and continues for ever with Him.

Eternal life is a free gift from GOD. If it is a gift, then it is not something that we earn, nor is it something that must be paid back. Consider the foolishness of someone who receives a gift given out of love and then offers to pay for it. A gift cannot be purchased by the recipient. A more appropriate response to a loved one who offers a gift is grateful acceptance with gratitude. Our salvation is a gift of GOD – not something of our own doing. GOD has freely given salvation to us.

Our short gospel passage for today shows us that our love for GOD can be measured by how well we treat others. JESUS' example of giving a cup of cold water to a thirsty child is a good model of unselfish service. A child usually can't or won't return a favour. GOD notices every good deed we do or don't do as if He

were the one receiving it. Although no one else may see us do something like this, GOD will notice.

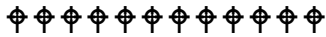


When we obey GOD, He will respond with blessings that will blow our minds. GOD promised Abraham that he would be the father of many nations – but Abraham and Sarah did not have any children. Then, when Isaac arrived, GOD asked Abraham to sacrifice him. Abraham obeyed GOD and GOD proved to Abraham that He indeed kept His promises. GOD did indeed provide the lamb for the sacrifice – both to Abraham and to us in the form of JESUS.

Our psalmist assures us that, like David, we can trust our feelings to GOD and find strength.

Paul tells us that CHRIST gives us the power to do good rather than evil and that to obey wholeheartedly means to give ourselves fully to GOD.

And our Gospel today teaches us that those who serve their fellow human beings out of love for JESUS are serving JESUS Himself and also the One who sent Him, GOD the Father.



May we pray:

Lord GOD help us to make hospitality our profound Gospel value and our special care. Help us to realise that you are the GOD who always keeps the promises you make so our trust will always be in you. This we pray in the name of JESUS. Amen

Life Application Study Bible

Daily Prayer 2020

God's Word 2020