

Lent 2 2024
Rev. Doug Floyd
Genesis 22:1-14

Abraham is called to “Go Ye Forth.” Lech Lecha. Some rabbis call him Lech Lecha, “Go Ye Forth.” Lech Lecha appears twice in Scripture. In Genesis 12 when Abraham is called to “Go Ye forth,” leaving behind his country, his family and his father’s house. This phrase appears a second time in Genesis 22, when Abraham is called to “Go Ye Forth” and sacrifice his son Isaac. His life is defined by this call.

Think about the first command in Genesis 12. “Now the Lord said to Abram, ‘Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you.’”¹ He leaves behind all that is familiar. The life and the people he knows. He is not even given a clear destination. He is to go to the land that the Lord will show him.

Think about your own past: your family and the place and people of your childhood. These things help shape our identity. Abraham must leave behind all that is familiar and step out into the unknown. Some of us have left our homes behind for work or ministry. Fr. Les even left behind this country and learned a new culture when he moved to Nigeria. Abraham’s identity is shaped by following the call of God to “Go forth.” His life will come to be identified through trust in the invisible God as he walks toward the future. . Popular historian Thomas Cahill even suggested that the possibility of an open future comes from Abraham.

When the Lord calls him, He also gives Abraham a promise. “And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”²

This blessing will come through Abraham’s offspring, but Sarah is barren. This concern for a child will occupy a great part of Abraham’s story. In Genesis 15, he considers making his servant Eliezer his heir. The Lord rejects that solution and tells Abraham that this offspring will be Abraham’s very own son

In Genesis 16, Sarah urges Abraham to have a child with her servant Hagar. And he does. Ishmael will be blessed of the Lord but he is still not the child of promise. This child will come through Abraham and Sarah. He must wait upon the Lord.

In many ways, Abraham’s whole story can be characterized through waiting upon this child of promise. Abraham and Sarah must trust in the faithfulness of God. In the mystery of God’s Providence, the child finally comes. Long after Abraham and Sarah have grown old and beyond child-bearing age. Their long path of barrenness reveals the world where they live. It is a barren world where humans have lost faith and turned away from God. The Lord is moving and

¹ *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ge 12:1.

² *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ge 12:1–3.

opening a new future in this world. He will raise up a people of redemption through Abraham and Sarah.

God in His goodness is faithful to His promise. Sarah conceives and gives birth to a son. His very name Isaac will reflect the joy and laughter that comes with the fulfillment of God's promise. The Lord has been true to His Word.

Then is our reading today: the unthinkable. The Lord tells Abraham to "Go Ye Forth" and offer Isaac in sacrifice. The faithfulness of God to His Word has been revealed in the birth of Isaac. How can we grasp this command. This child must be offered back to God. At the beginning of His story, Abraham must leave his past behind. Now he is called to let go of the future. He must stand in naked trust before God.

Consider a parent's love for their child. Oh the pain for a parent to see their child hurt in any way. Now Abraham is not only called to let go of this child but to sacrifice him. This is unimaginable. Listen to the words of John Calvin, reflecting on God's command:

For the great source of grief to him was not his own bereavement, not that he was commanded to slay his only heir, the hope of future memorial and of name, the glory and support of his family; but that, in the person of this son, the whole salvation of the world seemed to be extinguished and to perish. His contest, too, was not with his carnal passions, but, seeing that he wished to devote himself wholly to God, his very piety and religion filled him with distracting thoughts. For God, as if engaging in personal contest with him, requires the death of the boy, to whose person He himself had annexed the hope of eternal salvation. So that this latter command was, in a certain sense, the destruction of faith.³

How could the Lord give a command that goes against His very word of promise? How could Abraham obey? Philosophers and theologians have puzzled over this story for ages. Sore Kirkegaard called this, "The Teleological Suspension of the Ethical." That's a mouthful.

I think Scripture suggests that the long years of learning to trust in the faithfulness of God, had reshaped Abraham. The Lord is completely trustworthy. We know Abraham's mindset because the writer of Hebrews tells us. In Hebrews 11:17-20 we read,

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, of whom it was said, "Through Isaac shall your offspring be named." He considered that God was able even to raise him from the dead, from which, figuratively speaking, he did receive him back.⁴

The angel stops Abraham before he can sacrifice Isaac. A ram was caught in the thicket and Abraham offered the ram instead. Isaac was given back his life. We've been given back our lives

³ John Calvin and John King, *Commentary on the First Book of Moses Called Genesis*, vol. 1 (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2010), 560.

⁴ *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Heb 11:17–20.

for God our Father made a way through His Son Jesus. He is the author and finisher of our faith. We rest completely in His sure and faithful love.

We live in a world of suffering and sorrow, of sin and death. We will face times when we do not understand why we've been thrust into such suffering, but we can rest in God's sure and faithful word. As we read today in our second lesson:

³¹ What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? ³² He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? ³³ Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. ³⁴ Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us. ³⁵ Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? ³⁶ As it is written,

*“For your sake we are being killed all the day long;
we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered.”*

³⁷ No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. ³⁸ For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, ³⁹ nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.⁵

Throughout our entire lives we are learning to trust in God's absolute, unshakeable love. Bad things will happen in this life. We should not assume that God is trying to punish us. When I got Covid and lost my kidney, God in His grace revealed His deep in such a profound way, I could never assume He took away my kidney. The suffering immersed me more deeply into His love. When our house burned down, all I could think about was how good God had been to give us so many joyful years in that home.

I was able to give thanks because the grace of God sustained me on both these instances. There have been plenty of times in my life that I was angry and cried out to God. In fact, when they first discovered I had kidney disease in High School, I was so angry especially at the doctor. As it turns out, God worked through that disease to work in my life and teach me the way of His love.

The child's prayer over meals speaks deeply to me of the nature of our relation to God.

*God is great,
God is good,
Let us thank Him for our food.*

God is great. His rule is absolute, and no power can thwart His purposes.

⁵ *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ro 8:31–39.

God is good. He is just, trustworthy, and completely loving toward His children.

Let us thank Him for our food. Our life is a continual response of thanksgiving to God.

This little prayer is a helpful prayer as we follow Christ into the way of the cross. As we learn to trust Him in all situations and give thanks for His abundant mercy and grace.