St John's Anglican Cathedral,
Brisbane

SERMON

2nd July 2023

Ann Solari

Fifth Sunday after Pentecost

Genesis 22.1-14
Psalm 13
Romans 6.12-23
Matthew 10.40-42

The story of Abraham and Isaac that we listened to this morning puts us in a situation that most of us here just cannot comprehend. We know that Abraham loved Isaac more than anything else in the world, so why would he think that God wanted him to sacrifice Isaac, Isaac his only son?

But Abraham did not live in our world. Abraham lived in a world where gods were angry and demanding. A world were gods commonly demanded sacrifices. A world where angry, demanding gods needed to be appeased with blood, often human blood. Where gods commonly demanded the most precious things to be sacrificed, and this for most people meant their children. A world where if you did not do what your god demanded then you would not receive forgiveness, you and your people would not be blessed, you and your people could not thrive.

Abraham lived in a world where it was not unusual for fathers to take their sons up the mountain. But it was very unusual for a father to bring his son back down alive. Imagine being the father who didn't make the expected sacrifice to rescue his people, Abraham was taking a huge risk. Can we imagine how much courage it must have taken not to do what was expected? Can we imagine how difficult it must have been to be the first person to publicly stand up to the world's common expectation of what you should do and not kill your son? Can we imagine how great the risk was to himself to do this when human sacrifice was so common?

This became an important story for Abraham's descendants. This is the story that explained how they began to change their image of God. This is the story that allowed them to be different. This is the story that allowed the world to stop human sacrifice.

And slowly the image of God began to change. Slowly the people of God began to realise that God doesn't need animal sacrifices either. That God is not an angry, frightening God. That God doesn't need blood from us because God made us and loves us. God gives us what we need, God doesn't want to take away those whom we love, God loves them too.

In fact, it is not God that is angry and frightening, it is not God who is always looking for vengeance, it is us. It is humans who are the ones who seek revenge and retribution, not God. It is our hearts that need to change, not God's.

So, we can listen to this story and see it as part of our story, part of the tradition that we acknowledge as ours but is that all it is? Is there anything we need to learn from it?

We need to know that we are people just like the people of Abraham's world, and we make assumptions based on traditions and habits. We have not got it right yet. Our world is still not just, life is not fair for many people. The way we lead our lives results in misery, ill health, and sometimes death for other people, often people we will never know or see.

It is important that we remember that we still need to learn, we still need to discover, to rethink, to consider what we believe and how we perceive God to be. We are walking the same road that Abraham walked, do we dare to question the assumptions that are made by the world around us? Do we dare to think and behave differently?

Do we have the courage to look at our lives honestly and consider how we can change what we believe, what we teach, what we do to make this world a better place for everyone? Are we willing to strive to bring the Kingdom of God closer?

Amen