

Date: June 28, 2026 (Pentecost 5)

1. Texts: Genesis 22:1-14; Ps. 13; Romans 6:12-23; Matthew 10:40-42.
2. Subject: discipleship.
3. Topic: the limits of our discipleship.
4. Aim: challenge.
5. Proposition: "Each of us will have to figure out the limits to our faith."

## HOW FAR WILL WE GO?

Let's be clear: if God is who we proclaim him to be, then he already knew what Abraham would do. God didn't need to test Abraham's faith. The whole human sacrifice thing wasn't necessary, from God's point of view.

It is equally as obvious who *did* need the test—Abraham, of course. He needed to sort out how far his faith would reach. God had promised that he would build a nation from Abraham's offspring. But did Abraham actually believe this? Could Abraham actually obey God's command? Abraham had to sort out his commitment to God.

Abraham decided to trust God and to believe in his promises. Abraham was able to make great sacrifices for God's sake. He knew he could survive whatever God would ask of him in the future.

But there's something extraordinarily crucial about this story. It's something we frequently overlook.

You see, this story was written down LONG after Abraham even lived. The story was not written for his benefit at all. Like most of the Old Testament, the story was written down for the benefit of those who would later read it. This story was written for us.

Now we have to find our blessings in this story.

Abraham had to discover for himself what the limits of his faith would be. He had to be sure. He had to know.

This story sets before us the same question: how far would we go for God? What is our limit, our line in the sand beyond which we will not step?

Each Christian will have his or her own limit, his or her own boundaries. That's because faith is a relationship with God that is always personal and contextual. There is no "one-size-fits-all" when it comes to faith in God.

But we can begin to get a sense of our limits in the area of our relationships with other people, particularly other people with whom we might have conflict.

Jesus once said,

'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.<sup>1</sup>

Where is the boundary of your love? Do the homeless stand beyond the line you have drawn? Or maybe the immigrant whose skin colour or religious upbringing is different than your own. The story of Abraham is asking us such questions.

Jesus once said,

All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you.<sup>2</sup>

Perhaps we may be unwilling to cross the line with those people who we're certain will reject our understanding of salvation. We might say to ourselves that we're only protecting others, or that we don't want to appear like a spiritual bully. Abraham's example asks us, "How far will you take the proclamation of the faith?"

Of course, since such questions are individual and contextual, each of us will have to come up with our own, especially nowadays. Our province, our

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew 22:37-40.

<sup>2</sup> Matthew 28:18-20.

country and our world find themselves in a highly divisive time. We are estranged from family, friends and allies. We are finding it more difficult to tolerate the untrue and the manipulative. Others look for people to blame. Our social and political climates make our process of discernment more complicated.

But Abraham's story illustrates what we become once we have pushed ourselves beyond our limits of love and justice. We become ever more completely Jesus' disciples. We become the kind of people God wants as his representatives. We increase our experience of the divine, and in ways that propel us to share that experience with others. God created us in his image so that we might be his hands, feet and voice in the world. When we step beyond the limits of our faith, that image is strengthened and made more vigorous in us. We live the abundant life for which Christ lived, died and was resurrected—all because we responded to God's challenge to understand our own faith.

The story of Abraham and Isaac demonstrates that knowing the limits of our faith is worth the effort. God didn't need to see Abraham's response. Abraham had to learn of what he was capable. Abraham had to learn where his faith could lead him. Abraham had to experience what kind of follower of God he would become.

That story, Abraham's story, was written so that we might have that same experience.

AMEN.