

5<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost – Proper 8, Year A  
A Sermon Preached by The Rev Ian M Delinger  
on June 28, 2026

Genesis 22:1-14 / Psalm 13 / Romans 6:12-23 / Matthew 10:40-42

*Your love, O Lord, for ever will we sing;  
from age to age we will proclaim Your faithfulness.*

Imagine your career, your life's ambition, your vocation, everything you worked for, being taken away from you. And imagine that everything that you worked for being taken away from you was your choice. Whether that was a career in academia, or in medicine, or in law, or in accounting, or in teaching, or an administration, whatever you embarked upon at 18yo when you graduated from high school. It is now being taken away from you by your own choice. It seems very hard to imagine. But it happens. It happens to clergy. So many clergy have worked in secular careers, the career that they wanted to do since they were in high school. And then God calls, and they end up poorly paid, with too many hats to wear, in a parish that doesn't have enough volunteers to do everything they want to do, with declining membership.

More specifically, imagine a nurse who started her training at 18 years old and worked very hard in a couple different settings, honing her vocation to be at the top of her field. She then decides that she wants to share her expertise with others who aspire to be nurses. So she switches careers to become a lecturer in a nursing faculty in a university. And through that opportunity, she finds herself with another opportunity to teach her skills in part of the world that doesn't have adequate nursing care or medical care. So she puts together a program to teach nursing in a rural part of the undeveloped world, and from this, a hospital will be made great! That is what happened at the University of Chester.

Similarly, Abraham's vocation – from the moment we meet him in Genesis ch12 – Abraham's vocation is to be the father of many nations. But 10 chapters later – at 100 years old – he still doesn't have a child, except by his servant. The most

challenging aspect of Abraham's life was that he was promised that he would be the father of many nations, yet he was childless. Having a son with Sarah, the most challenging aspect of his life, was his vocation! And we hear in today's OT reading that he is asked to give up his son – arguably his vocation – and he willingly offers Isaac as a burnt offering.

It might be helpful to understand sacrifices and burnt offerings in the time that this story was written down. Sacrifices in ancient Israel were the means of relating to God and making covenants with God – it was their mode of spiritual journey. So, Abraham's connection and covenant with God was through sacrifice, and he offered the most valuable thing that he possessed: his son.

In ancient Hebrew the word for “burnt offering” literally translates “an ascending offering”. When the offering was entirely burnt on the altar, its smoke and its pleasing odor went heavenward where God got to “inhale” it. It's the basis for Psalm 141.2:

*Let my prayer be set forth in your sight as incense,  
the lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice.*

Of all of the types of sacrifices, the “burnt offering” was the one that was a gift to God, albeit a gift that is consumed as a “soothing odor” or even as food.

*What kind of God would make that request in the first place? That's the elephant in the room today. That's what you're all wondering. But I said it last week. A God who can make that request is a God who wants more than your faith: He wants also your soul.*

When we learn that Abraham is going to be the father of many nations, we learn that God reckons Abraham as righteous. So the offering up of the most challenging aspect of his life, the most long-awaited son and heir – his vocation described from the beginning at his introduction in ch12 – we can't be surprised that Abraham is actually going to go through with this, because he has been reckoned as righteous by God.

So how could this be compared to Nurse lecturers at the University of Chester? Well back in 2009, The Faculty of Health and Social Care formed a partnership with a hospital in rural Uganda in order to dramatically improve the quality of teaching and skills at their fledgling hospital. With great enthusiasm they developed a program, and we had a service of commissioning in Chapel before they went. And then in early 2010, a group of Nurse lecturers set off for Kisiizi Hospital to save rural Uganda. What they didn't know was that they would sacrifice everything they had worked for since they were 18 years old. Their "Isaac" was their vocation as nurses and nurse lecturers.

They were prepared for the nursing and the teaching. They were not prepared for the volume of death that the rural Ugandan hospital presented to them. Brave women whose vocation it was to save lives couldn't save all of them. Many of the deaths – mostly children – could have been prevented had they only had the skills and equipment that were so readily available back in the UK. It was overwhelming! And unbeknownst to them or to me, this is when they really needed a Chaplain: upon their return when the adrenaline of their intense time there wore off.

Their "Isaac" was their life's vocation as nurses that felt like it was being sacrificed in this context that they were not prepared for. They had offered their life's vocation humbly, but more was asked of them than they thought they could give. So...what did we do? We offered that challenge – the challenge of not being able to adequately put your life's work to full use – we offered it to God. We gathered the lecturers who had gone on the trip for a Day of Reflection. We went to the Diocesan Retreat Center and mixed reflection on the work with prayer and with personal time. And each of the prayer times included an offering of their joys and challenges to God.

This was probably not that easy for most of the Nurse Lecturers. They were some of the most non-religious – dare I say, *anti*-religious – people at the University – other than the Lecturers in the Media Department. They had also struggled with

Morning and Evening Prayer at the hospital in Uganda where they felt obligated to attend every day ... also on weekends which included Sunday Mass. But the heavy dose of death and the heavy dose of religion that they got in Uganda made a day with the Chaplain a bit more palatable.

They brought their “Isaac” – their life’s vocation that had been rendered inadequate – to the altar of openness. But with the willingness to lay their challenges on that pyre – to open their hearts and share their tears – the ram in the thicket eventually appeared: God provided!

Before the next team went to Uganda, they put a bunch of systems in place to prepare the staff, which included not only a briefing, but a rule that only something like half the staff could be newcomers. The other staff had to have been to Uganda before. They restructured the curriculum so that each time they went, resources were brought and skills were taught that would mean fewer people would die each time they went and between their visits. They figured out how to build resilience before they went, while they were there, and when they came back. That was their ram – that is what God provided – a way to give this most precious gift without destroying themselves.

Part of the Day of Reflection included an African-American Proverb:

*God makes three requests of us:*

*Do the best you can, where you are, with what you have, now.*

And they did, and they made it better each time.

What is your “Isaac”?

Just like Abraham, we are sometimes tested. Things are asked of us that we never saw coming, that we didn’t ask for, that we weren’t prepared for, that we don’t want to do. But if we are faithful, God provides. And it’s not always easy or simple. I’m not talking about the harmful platitude: *God doesn’t give you anything*

*you can't handle.* That's neither safe nor true. But God *does* provide – it doesn't always look like what we *want*, but when we are provided something, we should evaluate it against what we *need*.

Jesus Christ was indeed that precious gift – TWICE. That is stated most clearly in Philippians 2.6-8:

*Christ Jesus, who, though He was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death — even death on a cross.*

So, Jesus was a gift *to us* when God emptied Himself *being born in human likeness*. And Jesus was a gift *to God* by *being obedient to the point of death on a cross*. Which resulted in the gift *to us* of Eternal Life. God provided us with Himself ... in this weird confluence of God-Man, Passover Lamb, and all that other stuff that we eventually worked out to be Atonement, Trinity, Eucharistic theology. He was the 'Isaac' who became the ram in the thicket.

Trying to make the Gospel reading fit with this Genesis reading is a futile exercise, especially at the end of a sermon. But in a story that is about a test of your faith – can you or will you bring your 'Isaac' to the altar – Jesus is also talking about faith. If we have faith in our calling, we will not lose our reward – God will provide.

For 3 weeks, we have heard Jesus commission the Disciples – commission us – into a call that will be beset with danger, division, and pain. But, like Abraham's call, it will be worth it.

*Whoever welcomes prophet in the name of Jesus will receive Jesus' reward.*

That reward may not look like what you want it to look like; but it just might be what you need. Have faith that the Lord will provide.