

We jump from the creation story (last week in Genesis 1) to a story well within the life of Abram and Sarai. They have left everything: their land, home, culture and people to set out for the new place that God promised them. They have heard the promise of life – of the gift of children when they remain infertile and barren in their old age, and had their names changed to Abraham and Sarah (Genesis 11 & 12). They, who were dead, are now alive, with the birth of their son Isaac (whose name ironically means “laughter”). He, not Abram’s step-son Ishmael, is the promised way forward, the potential for life, for Abram [meaning “father”] to truly be Abraham [meaning “father of many”] as God promised when comparing his future descendants to the number of stars in the sky. This foundational family has discovered that the God in whom they trust is not one who makes bad people good, as much as a God who makes the dead alive.

Here Abraham is commanded by God to take Isaac and offer him in sacrifice. Abe has no good option, no way out. For either he obeys God and then sacrifices his own child (his future and life). Or he disobeys God and preserves Isaac. While the story is barbaric to our ears, it probably also was to Abraham’s, even if other neighboring cultures in the ancient world practiced child sacrifice as a way to entreat, appease and win over gods. (We read in Leviticus 20:2-5 of the ancient worship of Molech).

**as he had said** :: first verse of chapter 21 (the birth of Isaac) shows that God is firmly in control. God does as he said, delivers what he promises. There is a direct link between the word of God and what is experienced in the world. One is not greater than the other. They are connected and intersect.

**Abraham:** This Don’t forget that God changed Abram’s name from Abram (father) to Abrah-am (father of many) in the story recounted in Genesis 17 of God’s promise of a son. Isaac’s name too has a meaning “Laughter.” Meaning-full names are common in the First Testament, and in Hebraic culture. Here there is a double irony. When one has nothing else to say at a surprising result, marvelously unexpected and unplannable – such as what happens with Abraham and Sarah – the only thing one can do is laugh.

**Three:** Notice the repetition of three as a narrative element in the story. They travel for three days to get to the mountaintop. The expression “Here I am” is offered three times.

**HERE I AM:** Hineni (הִנֵּנִי), which means “Here I am!” It’s spoken many times in the stories of both Testaments, but it’s dangerous for it is a way of expressing total readiness to give oneself – it’s an offer of total availability - to the will of God. It is intertwined with the repetition but highlighted in the center use – on the third day, when it’s used for the second time in the text, it is followed by a different response. In verse 1 and verse 11 the one who says “here I am” doesn’t speak again! but rather receives an explanation. But in verse 7 Abraham speaks a second time, his response seems to be essential in the story, the trusting affirmation that God will provide when there are no other options.

## SCRIPTURES FOR

SUNDAY 9.24.2017

Genesis 21:1-3; 22:1-14

New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

**21** <sup>1</sup>The Lord dealt with Sarah **as he had said**, and the Lord did for Sarah **as he had promised.** <sup>2</sup> Sarah conceived and bore Abraham a son in his old age, at the time of which God had spoken to him. <sup>3</sup> Abraham gave the name Isaac to his son whom Sarah bore him.

**22** <sup>1</sup>After these things God tested Abraham. He said to him, “**Abraham!**” And he said, “**HERE I AM.**” <sup>2</sup> He said, “Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains that I shall show you.” <sup>3</sup> So Abraham rose early in the morning, saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him, and his son Isaac; he cut the wood for the burnt offering, and set out and went to the place in the distance that God had shown him. <sup>4</sup> On the ~~third~~ day Abraham looked up and saw the place far away. <sup>5</sup> Then Abraham said to his young men, “Stay here with the donkey; the boy and I will go over there; we will worship, and then we will come back to you.” <sup>6</sup> Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering and laid it on his son Isaac, and he himself carried the fire and the knife. So the two of them walked on together. <sup>7</sup> Isaac said to his father Abraham, “Father!” And he said, “**HERE I AM**, my son.” He said, “The fire and the wood are here, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?” <sup>8</sup> Abraham said, “God himself will provide the lamb for a burnt offering, my son.” So the two of them walked on together.

<sup>9</sup> When they came to the place that God had shown him, Abraham built an altar there and laid the wood in order. He bound his son Isaac, and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. <sup>10</sup> Then Abraham reached out his hand and took the knife to kill his son. <sup>11</sup> But the angel of the Lord called to him from heaven, and said, “Abraham, Abraham!” And he said, “**HERE I AM.**” <sup>12</sup> He said, “Do not lay your

**The Lord will provide** :: “Jehovah-jireh” or “Yahweh Yireh” (Jehovah/Yahweh will provide) was a place in the land of Moriah.

#### **Romans 4 – in which Paul refers to the story in Genesis 21 & 22**

<sup>1</sup>What then are we to say was gained by Abraham, our ancestor according to the flesh? <sup>2</sup>For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. <sup>3</sup>For what does the scripture say?

“Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness.” <sup>4</sup>

Now to one who works, wages are not reckoned as a gift but as something due. <sup>5</sup>But to one who without works trusts him who justifies the ungodly, such faith is reckoned as righteousness. <sup>6</sup>So also David speaks of the blessedness of those to whom God reckons righteousness apart from works:

<sup>7</sup>“Blessed are those whose iniquities are forgiven,  
and whose sins are covered;

<sup>8</sup>blessed is the one against whom the Lord will not reckon sin.”

<sup>9</sup>Is this blessedness, then, pronounced only on the circumcised, or also on the uncircumcised? We say, “Faith was reckoned to Abraham as righteousness.” <sup>10</sup>How then was it reckoned to him? Was it before or after he had been circumcised? It was not after, but before he was circumcised. <sup>11</sup>He received the sign of circumcision as a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised. The purpose was to make him the ancestor of all who believe without being circumcised and who thus have righteousness reckoned to them, <sup>12</sup>and likewise the ancestor of the circumcised who are not only circumcised but who also follow the example of the faith that our ancestor Abraham had before he was circumcised.

<sup>13</sup>For the promise that he would inherit the world did not come to Abraham or to his descendants through the law but through the righteousness of faith. <sup>14</sup>If it is the adherents of the law who are to be the heirs, faith is null and the promise is void. <sup>15</sup>For the law brings wrath; but where there is no law, neither is there violation.

<sup>16</sup>For this reason it depends on faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed to all his descendants, not only to the adherents of the law but also to those who share the faith of Abraham (for he is the father of all of us, <sup>17</sup>as it is written, “I have made you the father of many nations”)—in the presence of the God in whom he believed, who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist. <sup>18</sup>Hoping against hope, he believed that he would become “the father of many nations,” according to what was said, “So numerous shall your descendants be.” <sup>19</sup>He did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body, which was already as good as dead (for he was about a hundred years old), or when he considered the barrenness of Sarah’s womb. <sup>20</sup>No distrust made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, <sup>21</sup>being fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised. <sup>22</sup>Therefore his faith “was reckoned to him as righteousness.” <sup>23</sup>Now the words, “it was reckoned to him,” were written not for his sake alone, <sup>24</sup>but for ours also. It will be reckoned to us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead, <sup>25</sup>who was handed over to death for our trespasses and was raised for our justification.

hand on the boy or do anything to him; for now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me.” <sup>13</sup>And Abraham looked up and saw a ram, caught in a thicket by its horns. Abraham went and took the ram and offered it up as a burnt offering instead of his son. <sup>14</sup>So Abraham called that place **“The Lord will provide”**; as it is said to this day, “On the mount of the Lord it shall be provided.”

#### **Questions for the practice of Examen & Contemplation**

- What shimmers for you in this passage?
- Read it again. What phrase or image most speaks to you today?
- How do you interpret the passage? What is it saying about God?; About Abraham?; us?; the relationship of faith?
- How is God portrayed in this story?
- How does this story intersect the story of your faith and experience of God in your life?