

Abraham rejoiced to see Christ's day. He saw it and was glad. God made Abraham see what God himself sees. He did this by testing Abraham. God told Abraham to sacrifice his only beloved son, Isaac, on the mountain. It was in this way that God showed Abraham up close and personal what God himself sees. God would give up his only begotten Son whom he loves. He would offer him up into the most unspeakable misery and death, to bear the sin of the whole world, to be crushed by the wrath of God, forsaken by his loving Father. This was the love of God. This was what God wanted Abraham to see. Because this was what Abraham's faith was in.

When Abraham was walking with his son up to the mountain, he was walking the path of God. He was walking a mile in God's shoes, so to speak. The love he had for his son was thrown into a completely new perspective. Under the heavy burden of this trial, he saw love through the lenses of the Father who would give his Son up into death to save poor sinners. As he observed his son's child-like trust toward his father, and as he himself found nothing else to rely on than the good judgment of God, he saw love through the lenses of the Son who would patiently walk the road to Calvary, relying only on the Father to exalt him.

Jesus was accused of sin. He was rejected by his own kin, his own countrymen, his own people. He was accused of having a demon. They called him a Samaritan. In other words, they said he was being a bad Jew, a fake Israelite, not a true child of Abraham. But Jesus relied only on the judgment of his Father. As St. Peter says, "When others abused him, he didn't abuse them; when he suffered he didn't threaten but left it in the hands of him who judges fairly (1 Pet 2:23)." He didn't seek his own glory. Even though he already shared all glory with the Father from before the foundations of the world, he still entrusted himself to his Father who would honor him at the right time. He was obedient to his Father, even willing to be forsaken by his Father all the while trusting that his Father would exalt him. He had the power to raise himself from the dead, yet he still submitted to the will of his Father to give him life. He commended his spirit into the hands of him whom he has known from eternity.

This trust and obedience of the Son toward the Father is what God was revealing to Abraham on that dark walk up the mountain. Isaac asked Abraham where the lamb was for the burnt offering. Abraham responded, "God will provide for himself the lamb for the burnt offering." Isaac listened to his father. Through this trial, Abraham learned that he could not rely on anything else than on God to provide. He knew God's promise to him, that God would bless him and all nations through his offspring, Isaac. God had promised, in other words, that the Savior would come through the line of Isaac. So even though he is telling Abraham to give Isaac up into death, Abraham continues to rely on God. Even though it seems as though God has forsaken him, Abraham holds onto God's Word. And Isaac learns to do the same.

Jesus refuses to disown his Father even while he bears his wrath. "If I would say I don't know him," Jesus said, "then I would be a liar like you." Christ is loyal to his Father in every way, seeing that eternal love, which no eye can see. This is the boundless love of God, which is strange to our human reason. That the Father would offer up his Son into death, that the Son would willingly obey – such unspeakable love is beyond all understanding. But this love is the object of our faith. That is to say, it is what our faith relies on, especially in the face of death.

When Abraham was about to bring the knife down on his son, Isaac, the Angel of the LORD called out to him, "Abraham! Abraham!" The Angel of the LORD is the LORD himself. He is the Son of God. Abraham heard Christ speaking to him. And so he responded in faith, "Here I am." This is what faith does. Faith comes from hearing the Word of Christ (Rom 10:17). It therefore relies always on the Word of Christ,

always resting in what he says. Faith hears Christ's words and keeps them, clings to them, and is attentive to them.

This Word of Christ to Abraham was good news. "Do not lay your hands on the boy, and don't do anything to him." The Word of Christ proclaims life. "I tell you the truth," Jesus says, "if you keep my Word you will never see death." Abraham held onto the Word of Christ. These words were life and resurrection to Abraham and Isaac, who for all intents and purposes was as good as dead. Listen to how the writer to the Hebrews puts it:

By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered Isaac. Yes, this man who received the promises and was told: "Isaac's children will be called your descendants," was sacrificing his only son, thinking "God can even raise him from the dead." And so, figuratively speaking, he did. (Heb 11:17-19)

Abraham received his son back from the dead in a figurative way. Of course, Isaac wasn't killed. But this was a shadow and figure of the Father's offering of his only begotten Son. God said to Abraham, "Now I know that you fear God." Of course, God knew this already. He knows all things. But we cling to the knowledge God reveals. By making known that Abraham did not spare his only son, God was revealing what Abraham's faith was actually in. It was in this – that the Father would provide the sacrifice for all sins by offering his only, beloved Son into death.

Abraham continued to confess this saving truth. This is why he named the mountain, "The LORD will provide." He proclaimed that God would provide the sacrifice. This is what it means for Abraham to rejoice that he would see Christ's day. It means that he confessed that God would fulfill his promise. And even as he waited for this promise to be fulfilled, he saw a figure of it. He saw his son given back to him alive. He looked up and saw a ram caught in the bushes, offering it to God instead of his son as a figure of Christ. He waited joyfully for the day of the Lamb of God who would take the place not only of Isaac but of all sinners.

Abraham saw Christ's day, and he was glad. He saw the love of God. He tasted the agony and deep longing of the Father toward the Son. And he rejoiced to see the day when Christ came into the world.

When the Angel of the Lord declared that Abraham feared God, he was vindicating Abraham. In other words, he was declaring that Abraham's faith was not in vain. The world and our own human reason see Abraham as a child abuser, a fanatical adherent to a crazy, bloodthirsty, outdated deity. But the reality is that our own natural reason cannot even scratch the surface of God's love and compassion. Instead, those who slander and accuse Abraham and his Lord are themselves filled with envy and lust, and they are never satisfied. They will make excuses even for the most heinous murders as an attempt to vindicate themselves and show themselves to be pious and holy. While they mock our Lord's suffering and death as divine child abuse, they know nothing of the Father's deep love for fallen sinners. But God vindicates his name. He raised Jesus from the dead. And by raising Christ from the dead, he was revealing him to be the Lord God of Abraham. By vindicating his Son, God vindicated all who share the faith of Abraham. He has proven that our faith does not rest on sinking sand. Instead, it rests in the righteousness of God who bore our sins in the flesh and was raised again to give us life.

So don't despair if you have to go through trials. Perhaps you must be slandered and attacked for confessing the Word. Hold onto that Word, because God has vindicated it, and he will vindicate it again.

I know there are those of you who have had to give up your dear son or daughter when God saw it fitting to take them from you. Cling to the Word Abraham confessed. The Lord shall provide. He has provided. He has given his own Son whom he loves into death. He has raised him up. And he gives eternal life in his Word, baptizing you into his name. So cling to this Word. It is for you and for your children and for all who are far off. God's thoughts are not your thoughts, but you can know that his Word will not return empty. And as you rely on his Word he continues to conform your heart, mind, and eyes to look to what he has prepared for you.

When Jesus called himself God, the great "I AM" who appeared to Moses in the burning bush, the Jews picked up stones to throw at him. But Jesus hid himself and went out of the temple. One moment their eyes were beholding the very source of eternal life. And the next moment, because of their stubborn unbelief, he was hidden from them. The glory of God departed from the temple. That same temple was then destroyed about forty years later, just as Jesus had predicted. So where is the glory of God? Where is his dwelling place? It is right here in his Word, in his gospel, in his body and blood, in the salvation of your Savior declared to you here today. Christ was glorified through his suffering and death. God was glorified when his wrath and anger against sinners was turned away. The Father was glorified by raising his Son from the dead. And he is glorified when you, by the power of his Holy Spirit, confess this saving gospel throughout your life.

With Abraham, you rejoice to see the day of your Savior. By pointing to what Abraham rejoiced in, Christ is inviting you to rejoice in the same thing. Even if you must pass through death, you won't see death. Instead, you will see what God sees. You will see life. This is Christ's promise. This is what his day has brought. And this is what his day will bring. Let us pray:

Thou lay'st Him, Love, upon the cross,
With nails and spear Him bruising;
Thou slay'st Him as a lamb, His loss,
From soul and body oozing;
From body 'tis the crimson flood
Of precious sacrificial blood,
From soul, the strength of anguish:
My gain it is; sweet Lamb to Thee
What can I give, whose love to me
For me doth make Thee languish?

Lord, all my life I'll cleave to Thee,
Thy love fore'er beholding,
Thee ever, as Thou ever me,
With loving arms enfolding.
Yea, Thou shalt be my Beacon-light,
To guide me safe through death's dark night,
And cheer my heart in sorrow;
Henceforth myself and all that's mine
to Thee, my Savior, I consign,
From whom all things I borrow. Amen.