

This is my last sermon on the story of Abraham and his family for awhile. A couple weeks ago, I preached on the passage about Sarah laughing at the promises of God, which is how Isaac got his name. Isaac means laughter. And last week, we read a story about Sarah and Abraham casting out of their household Hagar and Ishmael. We learned that in this passage, Ishmael is left completely unnamed, but God hears his cries in the desert and promises them a great nation and provides water for Ishmael and Hagar. Ishmael means God hears. And then this week, we return to the story of Abraham and Isaac. This is another difficult passage for us to read. We are left wondering what kind of father Abraham must be to follow God's command to kill his own son. We are left wondering what kind of God would ask Abraham to do such a thing in the first place. Abraham is not winning any "father of the year" awards in my book. This passage takes places on Mt. Moriah. Many believe that Mt. Moriah is where the Temple in Jerusalem is now located, which provides an interesting historical context. Isaac being sacrificed in the spot where so many animal sacrifices would later take. In fact, some argue that this passage serves as an early condemnation of human sacrifices. God stops Abraham from sacrificing his son, and instead, provides a ram for his sacrifice. Mt. Moriah means "seen by God." Last week, we heard about God hearing Ishmael's cries. The week before, we heard about God hearing Sarah's laughter. And this week, we see God seeing Abraham and Isaac's distressing near-sacrifice. While not entirely letting God off the hook for this passage, what I find time and time again in the saga of Abraham and his family is that God is near and a very presence in their lives. God fulfills God's promises to this family, even when things didn't always go according to the plan.

God is near to us in our needs and a very present help in our lives. God fulfills God's promises, even when things don't go according to the plan. In this passage, God sees Abraham in his struggle and pain and intercedes at the last minute to save Isaac. Now, this is where I am not letting God off the hook. If God hadn't asked Abraham to sacrifice his own son, God would not have had to intercede to stop it in the first place. The most common way people solve this dilemma is by saying that God was testing Abraham and know how he was going to respond. God wouldn't have really let Abraham kill Isaac. Right? But what kind of test is that? And isn't it cruel to put Abraham and Isaac through this test, especially if there is a chance Abraham completes the sacrifice? And if God knew that Abraham was going to go through with the sacrifice at the beginning, then why test him at all? So, I'm not letting God off the hook on this one. I'm just going to have to be uncomfortable with this passage. But here is what I do like about this story. God shows up at when God sees the pain of Abraham and Isaac and saves Isaac's life. God is a very present help in our lives. God sent an angel at the right moment when God saw that Abraham was going to go through with the sacrifice. God reiterated God's promises to Abraham that he would be the father of many nations. God praises Abraham for his faith in God. God saw Abraham and Isaac and showed up in a real way in their lives.

God sees what is going on in the world. God sees the pain that is prevalent in our world right now. And I believe that God can and does show up in our lives in very real ways. It's not always with an angel and a commanding voice. Sometimes, God shows up in a phone call from a loved one who calls at just the right time to tell you, "I love you." Sometimes God shows up in a text from a friend telling you how much they appreciate you. There are lots of God moments in our lives. Have you seen them? Have you felt them? In a very real way, God can use each one of us to proclaim good news to the captives, hope to the hopeless, and love to the unloved. We are the hands and feet of Christ here on Earth. We have a sacred responsibility to stand up and share the love of God with everyone we meet. We can bring our voices and advocate for the poor in our community. We can collect food for the hungry. We can find shelter for the homeless. There are so many ways that God can show up in the world through our actions and responses. We have a lot of work to do, as well.

God shows up in real ways, often through the hands and feet and mouths of the Church. As things begin to open back up and people return to work, there is still a lot of needs that are going to need to be met. A lot of people are still struggling financially and physically and emotionally. We may be returning back to normal in a lot of ways over the next several days, but there are a lot of people still feeling like they are bound up on Mt. Moriah, just waiting to hear the angel of the Lord show up and shout "Abraham, Abraham!" Yes, we have a lot of work to do, First Presbyterian Church. Now is the season when we can

begin thinking of ways we can show the world that God is present, that they are not alone in the moments of great need and distress. Yes, there is a lot of work left to happen, dear church. So, let us get to work sharing the love of God with a world that desperately needs to know that they are not alone. Amen.