

Grace to you and peace from God, our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen. Dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

[Introduction]

Ashes to Ashes, dust to dust, you are Christ’s.

Our theme this academic year has been, “Thy Will be Done.” This has been a theme in which we have spent time contemplating and reflecting on God’s good and gracious will. We have done this by inserting the “pause” after “Thy will be done” in the Lord’s Prayer.

Now, that it is Ash Wednesday, and the season of lent is before us we will “pause” to not only reflect on God’s will in our own lives, but also to reflect how God’s will has played out in the lives of many of the founding members of our Biblical faith. How God’s will and God’s promise has granted them and us the forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation.

For Father Abraham and his son of promise, Isaac, God’s good and gracious will and God’s promise played out in a rather unique way.

[Oops!]

Abraham has a pretty comfortable life with God. He had his challenges, skeletons in his closet, but life for the most part seemed good. His faith walk is stable. The Promise of God feels secure and he can see it in action as he and his wife laugh in joy after the birth of their son, Isaac. God’s will and God’s Promise seem to be aligned, because here is Abraham’s son of promise in his wife’s arms.

Father Abraham saw that “from one man [Abraham himself], and him as good as dead, were born descendants as many as the stars of heaven and as many as the innumerable grains of sand by the seashore” (Heb 11:12). Father Abraham had many sons, and many sons had Father Abraham.

The years go by and Isaac grows and matures, but then all of the sudden, the rug is pulled out from under him. Everything Abraham thought he knew changes.

God tells Abraham, “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” (Ge 22:2).

The God of clear promise has become a God who is hard to understand. The good and gracious will of God and the promise of God suddenly seem more like the mystery and deceit of God.

Have you been there?

Life with God seems comfortable; you're not perfect, but you know you are forgiven; your faith is stable. And then the diagnosis comes. Then the car accident happens. Then your friend decides they don't want to be your friend anymore, or your spouse decides they don't want to be married anymore. And the God of clear promise becomes a God who is hard to understand.

[Ugh!]

It's hard and agonizing work struggling with God's will when he is hard to understand. However, despite the confusion, Abraham was quick to follow God's command. He rose early in the morning to make preparations and go to the place that God had told him. Yet, Abraham was surely in agony the whole time as he prepared for the sacrifice and set out on the journey. He was agonizing over the command to offer up Isaac, the son through whom God said all of his promises would come true. It was like Isaac was dead to him for three days. Dead as Abraham agonized and struggled with God's will. God's mysterious and confusing will.

As we, at Our Redeemer, struggle with the deaths of 8 of our Christian Brothers and Sisters this year we know that experience of death. We know what it's like to feel a relationship die. We know what it's like to stand at the graveside of someone we love. The wages of sin is death, and we live with the ongoing result of our sin and of sin in the world.

Could that have been what Abraham was thinking as he walked to the mountain with his Son? The wages of sin is death. Could Abraham have thought his own sins to be the cause of God's command to kill his son. It's hard when God's will is so very hard to understand.

[Aha!]

And yet, the God who was hard to understand always remained the God of clear promise.

As Abraham followed God's command and God's will, Abraham was in agony, but Abraham was also sure and confident in his trust of God's promise. Hebrews chapter 11 verse 19 tells us that Abraham not only believed God, Abraham reasoned

that God could raise the dead, because Isaac was the son of promise, the son through whom God said he would fulfill his promises.

That's how, as Abraham and Isaac walked up the mountain, and his son asks him, "Hey Dad, the fire and the wood are here, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?" Abraham was able to answer his son's question. Abraham was able to say, "God will provide for himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son." (Ge 22:8)

Abraham trusts that God himself will provide a lamb for the burnt offering. Abraham knows that on the mountain of the Lord it will be provided. God's Promise, gave Abraham the faith necessary to follow God's will. "By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac" (Heb 11:17). God's will and God's promise cannot fail.

[Whee!]

In the face of your sin and the consequences of your sin God's will and God's promise cannot fail. As we mourn the end of a relationship or the death of a friend, you can reason like Abraham. The God who is sometimes hard to understand is still for you the God of clear promise.

Father Abraham and Isaac are a foreshadowing of God the Father and Jesus. Isaac was to Abraham the son of promise. The son through whom all of God's promises came true.

To us, Jesus is the ultimate son of promise, the one and only one through whom God fulfilled his promises. God can raise broken relationships to life. God can restore families to each other. God can even undo death itself.

God has provided himself the lamb, who takes all the brokenness, all the sin, all the death into himself on the cross. Jesus has triumphed over death. And that victory is yours already now by faith, and will be yours by sight at Jesus' second coming in the new heaven and the new earth.

[Yeah!]

Abraham and Isaac came down from that mountain with a story to tell. It is still said to this day, on the mountain of the Lord it will be provided (Ge 22:14).

As you come through a moment of confusion, as you walk through the experience of brokenness, and as you trust God's promises, and come out on the other side, you also have a story to tell. God's will and God's promise gave you the gospel story. The gospel story, that on the mountain of the Lord it will be provided.

On mount Golgotha it will be provided. On mount Golgotha Jesus won the victory. Jesus paid the price for your sins by dying on the cross. Jesus overcame sin, death, and the devil.

When the will of God seems hard, remember God is still the God of clear promise. When you face sin, death, and confusion, trust God. Trust the God of clear promise, because, God has given you his son of promise, Jesus.

Through faith and through baptism you also are a son of promise. God is your God. “For if we have been united with [Jesus] in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his” (Ro 6:5).

Father Abraham had many sons, and many sons had Father Abraham. I am one of them and so are you, so let’s just praise the Lord.

Ashes to Ashes, dust to dust, **you... are... Christ’s**. Amen.

“Now may the God of peace... equip you with everything good that you may do his will, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.” (Heb 13:20-21)
