

Lent 3

Psalm 2; Genesis 22:1-18; John 10:14-18; John 17:1-8; Hymns 425, 438

Tonight is the third of our meditations on the cross of Christ.

In the first, we noted how the very shape of the cross indicates the coming together of the love of God and the love of man.

In the second, we saw how the very appearance of the victory of crucifixion also gives shape to our lives of faith.

Tonight, we will note how the crucifixion not only is the perfect depiction of Jesus' posture toward us and our posture toward him, but that it also shows forth the Father's heart.

Why, in the world, would God put Abraham to such a test?

This is a horrible story!

I've heard of Sunday schools that refuse to teach it because it is so barbarous

... not to mention scary for children to hear of a story of such a Father.

And then, to for Him to be extolled as a paragon of virtue because he did this!

Now Abraham is an example of faith for us to follow!

And look at the evil which has come as a result:

The religion of Molech--no doubt influenced by this story--considered it the height of virtue to sacrifice your children to their god.

So the Children of Israel had to be specifically forbidden to do this.

But still, fifteen hundred years later, the idea was still popular so the prophet Micah asked, rhetorically: 6:1 *Wherewith shall I come before the LORD, [and] bow myself before the high God? shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves of a year old? 7 Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams, [or] with ten thousands of rivers of oil? shall I give my firstborn [for] my transgression, the fruit of my body [for] the sin of my soul?"*

And even still to this day, you hear from time to time of those who kill their own children and then defend themselves by citing Father Abraham.

Yes, there are a thousand reasons to criticize God for this event.

To criticize the Holy Spirit for recording it.

Even to criticize the Church for reading it or preaching on it...

But there is one reason that makes it all come into focus.

For Abraham is not meant to teach us how we are to treat our children.

Rather, Abraham stands before us as a real-life picture of how God treated His.

And as such, we get not only a picture of what God has done in Christ.

But we also get a picture of what God the Father suffered in Christ.

The anguish and sorrow--the pain and loss that Abraham felt at this great trial, is exactly how God the Father felt and experienced the cross of Jesus.

When Simeon prophesied to Mary that "*a sword will pierce through your own soul also,*" He was speaking as much about the Mother of Jesus Christ as He was about His Father in heaven.

By this story we are given to understand that God, the Father, is not some unfeeling, uncaring deity who is detached and separated from us.

Much less is He some sadistic deity who takes pleasure in the cruel sufferings and death that He inflicted upon Jesus, His only-begotten Son.

Rather He is the one and only true Father and Jesus His one, and only-begotten Son.

With Jesus He is well-pleased.

Abraham was delighted at the birth of Isaac. His very name means "laughter." Ninety-nine years waiting--and twenty five years after Isaac had first been promised.

So you can imagine how precious was Isaac in Abraham's sight.

Now, take that and multiply a thousand times and you will begin to approach the joy and pleasure that the Father takes in Jesus.

And this should serve to dispel any last notions about some uncaring, unprotective and unloving Father who would callously dispatch his Son by crucifixion.

So, if the death of Christ was so terrible, both from the Father's perspective as well as from the perspective of example, Why would God do such a thing?

The answer is not found in the cruelty of God but in the fact that you are just as precious to Him as Jesus Himself.

God had the choice to make.

Either save One and sacrifice all -- or to save all and sacrifice One.

There was no other way.

For the crucifixion of Christ was not just preventative -- to keep us from death.

It was rather needed to pull you out of the death that you were already in.

St. Paul said, "You were dead in trespasses and sin."

The deed was done. The heart had stopped. The brainwaves had ceased.

And so God's choice was either to leave all of mankind in that condition.

Or, to put His only-begotten Son there to pull you out.

The fact that He chose as He did, is not a function of His heartlessness toward Jesus.

But is a function of His heartfelt love for you.

It is not a matter of His loving Jesus less than you had thought.

But a matter of His loving you more than you had thought.

Therefore, whenever you pass the cross, observe there not only Jesus' love for you.

But also the Father's own love for you.

See in the love of Jesus not somebody who counter-balances the Father's wrath against you, but rather somebody who exactly portrays the Father's love for you.

And this too, is why we keep the cross and crucifixion central to our life and teaching.

We trace the cross on our bodies from the day of our baptism forward.

We gaze upon it in paintings and sketches, in graphic relief and statuary.

For in that timeless symbol, we see God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

We see God: not divided against Himself--as though each person is striving against the other for control of our fate.

But rather we see One God, striving in unison against sin and death and devil that with one heart and one mind and one will He might love you

More than His only-begotten Son

More than His own life.

More than His very breath.

Through Jesus Christ, our Lord. AMEN.