

1st Sunday in Lent: Year B
Lutheran, Radcliff, KY
Genesis 22:1-18
Pastor Paul Horn

March 1, 2009

Faith

Follow without Question

Sermon note:

Christus Victor – Latin for *Christ the Victorious One*. *Christus Victor* will be the theme for our Sunday morning sermons the next weeks until Easter Sunday. Through Lent we follow Jesus as he marches toward Calvary, where he wins the victory over sin, Satan and death.

¹Some time later God tested Abraham. He said to him, “Abraham!” “Here I am,” he replied. ²Then God said, “Take your son, your only son, Isaac, whom you love, and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains I will tell you about.” ³Early the next morning Abraham got up and saddled his donkey. He took with him two of his servants and his son Isaac. When he had cut enough wood for the burnt offering, he set out for the place God had told him about. ⁴On the third day Abraham looked up and saw the place in the distance.. ⁵He said to his servants, “Stay here with the donkey while I and the boy go over there. We will worship and then we will come back to you.” ⁶Abraham took the wood for the burnt offering and placed it on his son Isaac, and he himself carried the fire and the knife. As the two of them went on together, ⁷Isaac spoke up and said to his father Abraham, “Father?” “Yes, my son?” Abraham replied. “The fire and wood are here,” Isaac said, “but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?” ⁸Abraham answered, “God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son.” And the two of them went on together. ⁹When they reached the place God had told him about, Abraham built an altar there and arranged the wood on it. He bound his son Isaac and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. ¹⁰Then he reached out his hand and took the knife to slay his son. ¹¹But the angel of the LORD called out to him from heaven, “Abraham! Abraham!” “Here I am,” he replied. ¹²“Do not lay a hand on the boy,” he said. “Do not do anything to him. Now I know that you fear God, because you have not withheld from me your son, your only son.” ¹³Abraham looked up and there in a thicket he saw a ram caught by its horns. He went over and took the ram and sacrificed it as a burnt offering instead of his son. ¹⁴So Abraham called that place The LORD Will Provide. And to this day it is said, “On the mountain of the LORD it will be provided.” ¹⁵The angel of the LORD called to Abraham from heaven a second time ¹⁶and said, “I swear by myself, declares the LORD, that because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, ¹⁷I will surely bless you and make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as the sand on the seashore. Your descendants will take possession of the cities of their enemies, ¹⁸and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed, because you have obeyed me.”

My brother-in-law is a 1st Lieutenant in the Army, currently serving in Iraq. I received an e-mail from him last Monday. He informed me that he recently took over as company XO (Executive Officer). He enjoys this position because he has the ability to affect his

entire Troop rather than just the Platoon. He also grooves on his new responsibility to supply his Troop with the coolest military toys and gadgets. As a 1st Lieutenant my brother-in-law understands the importance of following his CO's (commanding officer's) orders. The safety of his men depends on following those orders.

There's a story in the Bible about another XO, one who didn't follow the orders of his CO. In the time of the Judges, the people of Israel abandoned their worship of the LORD and followed heathen gods. To discipline his people, he allowed the armies of neighboring nations to oppress his people. In this instance, the army of general Sisera oppressed the Israelites for 20 years. One day, the LORD sent a prophetess, a woman by the name of Deborah, to a man named Barak. Deborah told Barak that the LORD had ordered him to take Israel's army and attack Sisera's army, and the LORD attached a promise, "I will surely give him into your hands." But Barak hesitated. In his mind he could not reason how the Israelite army could defeat Sisera, who had 900 iron chariots in addition to his infantry. Barak failed to follow God's directive without question. (read entire story in Judges 4-5).

This morning in our story from Genesis 22, a man receives orders from the heavenly company commander. In this story the man follows the LORD's order without question. It is my prayer that through our study of this lesson, the Holy Spirit will lead you to see that as Christians, you and I will also follow without question.

Abraham was that man. He trusted the LORD's first directive. God commanded Abraham to pack up his entire household and move far away from his homeland and family and settle in the foreign country of Canaan. The LORD promised that Abraham's descendants would one day possess that land as their own. There was only one problem: Abraham and his wife had no children. The LORD promised that he and his wife would have a son. And through that son, all nations on earth would be blessed. For from this nation of the Hebrews, the promised "offspring of the woman" would be born and crush the serpent's head (Gen 3:15). For 25 years Abraham and his wife waited, until finally, at age 100, the LORD blessed Abraham with Isaac.

This is where our lesson begins, "**Some time later God tested Abraham.**" The LORD said, "**Take your son, your only son, Isaac, whom you love, and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering.**" You want me to do what?! This command was contrary to everything that the LORD had promised his servant. All of God's promises depended on his son Isaac. How could he carry out this order? What is more, the word that the LORD used for "sacrifice" meant "whole burnt offering." The entire animal was killed and consumed by the fire. The LORD expected total commitment from Abraham. And yet...

And yet our lesson says, "**Early the next morning Abraham got up and saddled his donkey.**" The faithful patriarch moved to action without hesitation. The mountain to which the LORD sent Abraham was Mount Moriah. Interestingly enough, this was the same mountain upon which Solomon would construct his temple, where thousands of sacrifices were made on the altar, the same mountain on which the Lamb of God himself

would be sacrificed on the altar of the cross. After three days of traveling, a long time for Abraham to think about this whole situation, he still demonstrates his total commitment to following the LORD's command. He said to his servants, "**Stay here with the donkey while I and the boy go over there. We will worship and then we will come back to you.**" Did you catch it? He said, "**We will worship and we will come back to you.**" Although up to this point in history, no one had been raised from the dead, Abraham believed that after he killed and burned his son as a sacrifice, the LORD would raise his son Isaac from the dead (see Hebrews 11:17-19). It was the only explanation for the LORD to keep his promise, otherwise the LORD would have to break his promise. And the LORD had never broken a promise. It was his namesake. The LORD in Hebrew is Yahweh, the God of promise, the covenant God.

As father and son climbed the mountain, Abraham's heart must have broken when his son asked him, "**The fire and wood are here, but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?**" Again, we see Abraham's total dependence upon the LORD's promise in his response, "**God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering.**" Then, they reached the place God had told Abraham about. The faithful patriarch gathered stones and constructed an altar. He arranged the wood on the altar, and then, Abraham tied his son's hands and feet with rope and laid his son, his only son, whom he loved so dearly, on top of that altar. And then, as Abraham firmly held his knife in his hand, ready to draw the cold blade across his son's throat, the angel of the LORD reached down from heaven and called, "**Abraham! Abraham! Do not lay a hand on the boy!**"

God has not called us as parents and grandparents to sacrifice our children or grandchildren to show our faithful obedience to the LORD. If we claim he has, we would end up in a place with padded cells and straight jackets. But God does still call us today through his Word. He still demands our total obedience to his commandments. He insists that we follow him without question. His commands challenge our human reason just as much as his request of Abraham to sacrifice his own son. For example, the Lord demands that we defend the truth of his Word. Do not compromise any of the doctrines of Scripture. Our sinful human reason stops and asks, "You want me to do what?" When we defend the truth that life begins at conception, some out there will retort, "But a woman has a choice! She can do what she wants with her own body!" When we defend the Scriptural teachings of close communion and infant baptism, some are offended and leave the church. We've been tackling a difficult subject in Sunday morning Bible Class; Christian Citizenship in Church and State. In his Word our God tells us to obey and respect the government, even pray for them, although at times its members are corrupt and godless. Our Lord demands that we forgive one another, even if they've sinned against us over and over and over again. He demands that we not hold grudges over piddly arguments. We respond with skepticism, "But Lord, you don't understand what they did to me! How do you expect me to obey that command?" When the stock market isn't supplementing your retirement fund as you hoped, when your job security is questionable, Jesus tells you, "Seek first my kingdom and my righteousness and all these things will be added to you as well." We respond with apprehension, "Lord, you still want me to set aside the first part of my income and the best of my time and my abilities

in service to you, Lord? And you promise that you'll give me what I need?" He says, "Yes! Follow me without question! Look at my servant Abraham!"

What an awesome picture we have in our lesson this morning! Imagine if you were Isaac, lying uncomfortably on that pile of wood, sticks poking your back, hands and feet bound by rope. Your father looks down at you with sad, yet determined eyes. You look around. There's no way out. No reason to cry out. No one will hear on that remote mountain. But as your father is about to slice your neck with his knife, an angel calls out, and your father suddenly stops. He cuts the ropes, embraces you, and offers a substitute sacrifice in your place: a ram...a male lamb, caught in the bushes.

Because of our sins of doubting God's promises, we ought to be sentenced to die for all eternity. Instead of plunging the knife of his vengeance into our hearts and souls, the Father finds a substitute: the Lamb, his son, his only son, whom he loves so much. The innocent Lamb of God comes and lives a life of willing obedience.. Not once does he hesitate to stand up for the truth of Scripture, even when it inconvenient for him. He obeys his government and submits to their authority, even though they are corrupt and godless. He forgives those who sin against him, even those who unlawfully arrange his execution. Never once does he question his Father's commands. He willingly goes to his death. Like Isaac, he is silent, like a lamb led to the slaughter. He does not open his mouth in protest. He suffers the Father's wrath against him, punishing him for your sins and mine. For our sins of skepticism, unwillingness to listen and obey, for our failure to faithfully obey God without question, the Lamb is sacrificed as our substitute.

The Lamb of God gives you no reason to doubt his love for you. He reminds you through this baptism font, that your sins have been washed away through water and the Word. The Lamb of God gives you no reason to doubt his love for you through his holy supper. He promises you, that by eating and drinking this bread and wine you are also eating and drinking the same body and blood that was punished for you on the cross. You have every reason to believe that you can and will put your full trust and confidence in him, in death and in life. Because...let's face it. There are not many things in this world we can trust. Promises from politicians, employers, friends; guarantees from home builders and automobile manufacturers.

We will trust our God. When he commands us to respect, honor and obey our government, we will do that. When they pass laws that are godless, God reminds us that he is in charge and promises to work it out for the good of his children. When the Lord commands us to defend the truth of the Scriptures, even when it is not convenient, even though we might lose friendships, lose members of the church, the Lord promises that blessed are those who are persecuted, blessed are those who stand firm for theirs is the crown of life. When the Lord commands us to forgive, we will, even if it means swallowing our selfish pride, even if it means setting aside the horrible things that others say and do to us, we will forgive, because Christ has forgiven us. We will follow without question.

Do you remember that story about Barak, the army officer, who did not follow his commander's orders? The LORD God allowed Deborah, a woman, to lead Israel's army, and she completely defeated Sisera and his chariots. In fact, the Bible says that all of the troops of Sisera fell by the sword. The honor of victory went to a woman, which, in that culture, was unmentionable. In our lesson this morning, Abraham's human reason must have been screaming at him, "What are you doing? This doesn't make sense!" But he followed the LORD without question. The Lord Jesus followed his Father's orders without question and marched to Calvary's holy mountain, where we won our victory over sin and Satan, over hell and our graves. We, too, will listen to our heavenly commander's orders, and follow faithfully, without question. Amen.