

St Stephen's News

ST STEPHEN'S ANGLICAN CHURCH · TIMONIUM, MARYLAND

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A MEDITATION ON TRINITY VII

God's love for his people

- a study in contrasts

St. Mark's account of the feeding of the Four Thousand – the subject of today's Communion Gospel reading – provides us with an unforgettable example of the love God has for his people. Four thousand men, plus women and children – stranded far away from home, with nothing to eat and no way of obtaining it – are miraculously fed, with seven small loaves and a few smokes fishes.

It is our assurance that, no matter how bleak our situations might appear, God will take care of us – not simply making things better, but, ultimately, making things turn out for the best. What's more, the incident teaches us God is aware of our needs long before we do and has already made the plans necessary to help us.

Contrast this picture of a loving, caring God with the God we meet in another of the readings appointed for today – Genesis, Chapter 22, Verses 1-18; the story of Abraham's attempt to sacrifice his son Isaac. At first reading, God does not come out of this episode looking particularly kind and caring. Not only does God appear to be cruel and heartless, he also looks like a total ingrate.

Abraham has committed himself entirely to God and taken the most extraordinary leap of faith. He has given up family, friends, his high social standing in one of the most sophisticated societies the world has seen to go wandering, at his new God's behest, in a land he hardly knows – a stranger in a strange land.

And what is Abraham's reward for his remarkable leap of faith? Not much one might think. He accumulates a certain degree of wealth, but no more than he could reasonably have expected had he remained in the comfort and security of the city of Haran.

In return for his covenant with God, acknowledging God's sovereignty over him – God promises to make him "the father of many nations" and to give his descendants the land of Canaan to live in at some unspecified future date. Abraham's most tangible reward is a legitimate son, Isaac, miraculously born to his wife, Sarah, long after she was past child bearing.

But instead of leaving poor Abraham to enjoy his son, Isaac, in peace, God plays a horribly mean trick on him. He tells Abraham to load a donkey with fuel and take Isaac to Mount Moriah. There, Abraham is to sacrifice Isaac as a burnt offering to demonstrate his obedience to God.

How can God purport to be a God of love when he puts this unfortunate man, who had given up everything for him, through three days of utter anguish? It makes not a whit of difference that just as Abraham was about to plunge in the knife, God send an angel to say: "God believes you. You needn't to go through with it."

Isaac is, terrified, lashed to the altar, screaming for his life and his dad is standing over him with a dagger. That's not something likely to enhance the father/son relationship. It seems an appallingly cruel thing that God did to the pair of them. Let us, however, pause to consider what God was doing:

God's entire purpose in all this was to reveal himself to Abraham, and, through Abraham and his descendants, to reveal himself to mankind – a rather complicated process. God didn't expect Abraham to develop the picture of himself that he wanted to convey to us within the span of a single human life. The process of revelation took thousands of years. If we count it as beginning with

Abraham, it took best part of 2,000 years until it was completed in Jesus Christ.

The lessons God taught Abraham seem today to be simple and straightforward. By the time, God asked Abraham to sacrifice of Isaac, he was well aware that God is one – a big leap for a person brought up to believe that there are large numbers of Gods. He had also learned God is holy; that he is perfectly righteous and just and that there are consequences to disobeying him. And God taught Abraham that he is also perfectly loving and merciful in exactly the same manner.

Human sacrifice was the rule in Abraham's day. People of his culture believed the gods demanded the lives of their first-born children – the most precious thing they possessed. One can imagine Abraham thinking that the new God, whose servant he had become – while different in virtually every respect from the pagan Gods – was in this one vital respect the same as the others in that he

Parish Prayer List

Our Prayer Chain offers prayer daily for people on the Prayer List and guests of the Joseph Richey Hospice. To add a name to the prayer list, or visiting list, or to join the Prayer Chain, call the parish office (410) 560 6776.

FOR RECOVERY: Bill, Pam, Eileen, Rebecca, Catherine, Richard✕, Janis, Daniel, Leona, Rachel, Elizabeth, Kim, Dorothy, Donna, Skip, Dan. Sarah, Betsy, Edie, Heidi, Alan, Terry, Helen, Linda, John, Neal, Stephen, Nathan, Hobie, Betty, Helen, Jan, Bobby, Lee, Cary, Marie, Jim, Joanna, Kendall, Ian, Gloria, June, John Tom, Michell, Jack, Lewey, Stephen, Pamela, David, Wade, Sifa, Eileen, Ravi, Theresa, Larry Ricard, Judy & Scott

FOR LIGHT, STRENGTH & GUIDANCE: Cameron, Caroline, Karen, Ardis, Mavis, Michael, Melba, Sam, Vinnie, Doug, Chip, Elizabeth, Ian, Lisa, Carey, Jacob, Casey, Beth, Kath, Rebecca, Colin & Christian.

IN MEMORIAM: Betsy LeBrun Caspari Merrick

THOSE WHO MOURN: Samuel S. Merrick & family

ON ACTIVE SERVICE: Lt. Col. Charles Bursi, Lt Nicholas Clouse, USN; Lt Col. Harry Hughes; USAF; Cpt Fiodor Strikovski, US Army.

demanding proof in human blood that Abraham worshipped him above all things.

To teach him otherwise, God allowed Abraham go through his effort to prove his devotion in the traditional manner. But he stopped him seconds before his knife plunged into Isaac's heart to drive home the fact that God abhorred and condemned this appalling practice.

True, Abraham and Isaac must have suffered terrible mental anguish, but their anguish would have been far outstripped by their joy at learning God not require them to sacrifice their children to him, and, indeed, God, himself, would provide the sacrificial victim to atone for their sins.

It was lesson so dramatic it stayed with Abraham and Isaac's descendants for 1500 years or so – until shortly before the Babylonian exile when they began sacrificing babies to the Phoenician god Moloch outside the walls of Jerusalem. What's more, the lesson was not complete until 500 years later when God revealed the full extent of his love for us in the identity of sacrificial victim he promised Abraham to atone for our sins.

It is astonishing – indeed, awesome – to contemplate that God freely made for us, his creatures, the sacrifice he prevented Abraham making. GPH✕

FROM THE PARISH CLERGY

New County rules on Covid19

Dr. Gregory Wm. Branch, Health Officer for Baltimore County, has promulgated the following order: “Beginning Thursday, July 23 at 9 a.m., Baltimore County individuals ages 2 and up are required to wear face coverings in any indoor business, service, organization or establishment that serves the general public. This includes, but is not limited to, retail establishments, recreational establishments, houses of worship and other locations open to the public.

Residents are strongly encouraged to wear masks in outdoor public areas where social distancing of at least six-feet is not possible. Exemptions to the decree are:

- Individuals who cannot wear a face covering (as defined in Governor's Executive Order No. 20-04-15-01) due to a medical condition, mental health condition, or disability;
- Individuals who are communicating or seeking to communicate with someone where the ability to see the mouth is essential for communication;
- Individuals at food service establishments while eating or drinking, which shall all be subject to the same existing regulations and exceptions previously in place under the Governor’s Executive Orders and the Health Officer Orders

of the Maryland Department of Health In addition, all non-seated parties, must wear a face covering when moving in or about a restaurant or bar premises.

- Individuals are not required to show documentation that an exception applies.”

The full text of th Health Department Directive and Order and the Interpretive Guidance can be found at the County web site.

Our Sunday service schedule

Services will resume at 8.00 AM, 9.15 AM and 11.00 AM and we shall be celebrating the Eucharist at all services. Sunday School will be informal.

For shut-ins and folks st in quarantine we will be continuing our videos of Feast Day and Sunday Eucharists. These are posted on the **parish website (www.ststeve.com)**, **Youtube** and **Isaac the Eagle’s Facebook** page.

You’ll find them from 9.00 AM onwards every Sunday and Day of Obligation at **ststeve.com** at the bottom of the Home Page, under “Recent Blog Posts. A new midweek “broadcast” talk by the rector can also be found on the website every Wednesday or Thursday.

Meanwhile, we have opened a Post Office Box for the exclusive use of the treasurer. Please mail your offerings to: **St Stephen’s Anglican Church, P.O. Box 6161, Timonium, MD 21094**. All other mail should be sent to our street address. GPH✘ & JPN✘

St Stephen’s Anglican Church

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www.ststeve.com

The Very Rev. Guy P Hawtin, Dean & Rector
The Rev. John Novicki, Vicar ·

Associate Rectors:

The Rev. Michael Belt, The Rev. C. Daniel Bursi,
The Rev. Dr. Norman Flowers,
The Rev. M. Wiley Hawks & The Rev. Mark Newsome,
Mrs Happy Riley, Director of Pastoral Care
& Wedding Coordinator

SUNDAY SERVICES

8am: Said Eucharist

9.15am: Sung Eucharist (with Nursery & Church School)
11 am: Sung Mattins (1st Sunday: Sung Eucharist)
Choral Services (as announced) – evensong.ststeve.com

WEEKDAY SERVICES

Wednesday, 6pm: Evening Prayer
Friday, 12 noon: Healing Eucharist
Saturday, 5pm: Family Eucharist

For Our Country.

ALMIGHTY God, who hast given us this good land for our heritage; We humbly beseech thee that we may always prove ourselves a people mindful of thy favour and glad to do thy will. Bless our land with honourable industry, sound learning, and pure manners. Save us from violence, discord, and confusion; from pride and arrogancy, and from every evil way. Defend our liberties, and fashion into one united people the multitudes brought hither out of many kindreds and tongues. Endue with the spirit of wisdom those to whom in thy Name we entrust the authority of government, that there may be justice and peace at home, and that, through obedience to thy law, we may show forth thy praise among the nations of the earth.

In the time of prosperity, fill our hearts with thankfulness, and in the day of trouble, suffer not our trust in thee to fail; all which we ask through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

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