

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ.

Our text for today is the Old Testament reading from Genesis. It clearly states: "...God tested Abraham." Testing is NOT tempting. Temptations come from Satan. Our sinful flesh gives in to temptations. Testing comes from the Lord. "Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am being tempted by God," because God cannot be tempted by evil, and he himself tempts no one" (James 1:13). Like Abraham, you can pass God's test.

This passage is a beautiful foray into the kindness of God and into the strangeness of God. God's ways are not our ways, and this becomes obvious as we work our way through the narrative. As our passage begins, God calls to Abraham. "Abraham answers, 'I am here.'" In the original Hebrew, he said behold, I am here! Next, God instructs Abraham on what to do. "Take your only son Isaac, whom you love, and sacrifice as burnt offering." "But wait!", you say. "Abraham had two sons!" But remember, Ishmael had been sent away. Therefore, Isaac was considered Abraham's only son. And note that Abraham does not hesitate. Early in the morning gets everything ready. He then sets out on trip. 50 miles later, on the third day, the place is finally in sight. They have had lots of time to talk on way. Faithfully trusting Abraham tells the young men that He and Isaac will go onward. They will worship. He says that they will return to them. Not just Himself. There is a lot of trust from Abraham here.

Abraham has everything needed for the sacrifice. Wood carried by Isaac. Fire. Knife. But now Isaac calls to his father. Abraham answers. "I am here, my son." He uses the same word: behold! Isaac realizes that something is wrong – something major is missing. Isaac asks his father where the lamb needed for the sacrifice is.

This is quite a test the Lord had for Abraham. Sacrifice your only son, whom you love. But Abraham listened. Abraham unquestioningly did what the

Lord had asked. He acted in faithfulness to the word of God. And this wasn’t the first time – he did this before. In Genesis 12, The Lord asks Abraham to leave his family, homeland, and friends. He is told to travel from Ur to Canaan. Abraham heard. He listened. He traveled. Abraham faithfully trusted the voice of the Lord. Only faith can or will listen to God. Only with faith can we obey his word and carry out the Lord’s will. Scripture defines faith for us. "Faith is being sure about what we hope for, being convinced about things we do not see. For by this faith the ancients were commended in Scripture" (Heb. 11:1, 2). We are sure of what we hope for. We are certain of the things we do not see. Heaven is our home. Such is the confidence of the faith our loving, heavenly Father has given to each one of us. We faithfully trust.

And we do know that God sends tests our way in life. These tests strengthen our faith. Each one reminds to look to the One who holds our future in his hands. A future that is always meant for the good of those who are called according to his purpose. We also know that the devil sends deceptive temptations our way. His lies have not changed since the beginning. Satan whispers: “Did God really say?” “Is the LORD the only true God?” “A little sin is not that bad.” That is of course a lie. Sin is sin. The Lord does not measure wickedness. All sin is the same. Thankfully the Lord has worked faith in our hearts. God has given us the spiritual wisdom to recognize that which is evil. We can and do distinguish good from evil. Light from darkness. "Test everything. Hold on to the good. Keep away from every kind of evil" (1 Thess. 5:21, 22). God’s Word destroys the devil’s deceptions. Faithfully trusting in God, we pass God’s test.

Abraham displays an excellent example of faith put into action. He hears. He believes. He does. No questions asked. Faithfully trusting. People often asked Jesus about faith. Believing. Getting into heaven. Of course, they, like

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many today wanted to depend on they need to do. Jesus made it “simple”.

“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength” (Mark 12:30). A simple truth which demands faithful trusting. We love because God first loved us.

Back to our events depicted in our Old Testament reading. Isaac asks about the missing sacrificial lamb. Abraham replies, “God himself will provide...” So now they come to the place for the sacrifice. An altar is built. Isaac is bound. He is placed on wood. And now the penultimate moment. Abraham takes the knife and reaches out to sacrifice his son Isaac. He is ready to carry out God’s instructions, no matter how much it will hurt him. Suddenly, an angel calls out to Abraham. He replies again with “Behold, I am here.” The angel has new instructions for Abraham. Stop. Do not harm your son. Do not sacrifice Isaac. The LORD will provide.

Just as Abraham promised Isaac, a ram caught in the brush is the suitable sacrifice that the LORD provided. Abraham calls the name of that place “The LORD Will Provide.”

The Lord will provide. This is always very important for us to remember. Even in situations that seem almost impossible to overcome, the Lord is there with his love. His help. On a mountain the disciples worried they didn’t have enough food to feed the crowd. They had only two small fish. Five loaves of bread. Jesus blessed it. Gave to the crowd. Provided abundantly. “They all ate and were filled. They picked up twelve basketfuls of what was left over from the broken pieces” (Matt. 14:20). All who ate had their fill. 5,000 not counting women and children. Today the Lord still abundantly provides.

Satan wants us to think we need just a little more in order to happy. Just a little more than our neighbor. Or we might think we have been cheated compared to everyone else around us. How come the wicked seem to be

getting ahead in this life? Why do evil people seem to get whatever they want? You want to remember they are trying to make a heaven on earth for themselves. It will not happen. They will never be satisfied. Followers of Christ: godliness and contentment go hand-in-hand. You cannot have one without the other. Ponder God's truth: "I was a young man. Now I am old. But I have never seen a righteous person forsaken or his children begging for bread" (Ps. 37:25). Can you think of any believing friends who have been forsaken by God? Probably not many, if any. The Lord has given you a generous heart filled with his love to provide for those in need. The Lord will provide!

As part of our faith, we dare not overlook the Lord's spiritual blessings that he pours out on us abundantly. All of our loving, heavenly Father's gifts are perfect. All of his gifts come without any merit or worthiness in us. This is amazing grace. Our sins are forgiven. Heaven is our home. "For at the appointed time, while we were still helpless, Christ died for the ungodly...But God shows his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:6, 8). While being helpless Christ died for us. While still sinners Christ died for us. The Lord did provide a Savior for our sins. The world's sins. Jesus rose again from the dead. We too will rise. Live forever. Jesus really passed the test for us. Willingly. Perfectly.

Friends, God's tests come and go. The Lord God makes sure we will pass each one. Not by ourselves. With and by Jesus. We put our faithful trust in the only One who provides us salvation. Our Redeemer. The Messiah. The Lord Jesus Christ. Our Savior provides eternity by his holy, precious blood. His innocent suffering and death. "I have been crucified with Christ, and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I am now living in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me" (Gal. 2:20).

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Christ lives in us! We faithfully trust in the salvation Jesus has provided. You can pass God’s test. Amen.