

"God Himself Will Provide"

Text: Genesis 22:1-14

Grace, mercy, and peace be yours through the suffering and death Jesus Christ, who died that we might live. Amen.

Our two Scripture readings for this morning deal, at least in part, with temptation. The first made it clear that God is never the source of temptation. The goal of temptation is always sin, and God would never, could never, promote anything but holiness. The source of temptation is always the devil, the world, and our own sinful flesh – all of which *do* promote and revel in sin. Our second reading reminded us that Jesus too was tempted by Satan, and the parallel account of the temptation of Jesus in the Wilderness (in Matthew 4) revealed that Jesus withstood that temptation by using the Word of God, against which Satan was powerless.

Our sermon text for this morning further expands our understanding of temptation by revealing to us what our God *does* do to, and for, his children. He does not tempt us, but he does *test* us. While the object of temptation is sin, the goal of God's testing is always a strengthening of our faith in him as our Provider, Protector, and Savior.

In fact our text tells the story of one of the greatest tests that God ever brought into the life of one of his children, for here we read that God commanded Abraham to sacrifice his only son, Isaac. The text that will form the basis for our study this morning is found recorded in the Book of Genesis, the 22nd Chapter, beginning with the First Verse:

ESV **Genesis 22:1-14** **After these things God tested Abraham and said to him, "Abraham!" And he said, "Here am I." ² He said, "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 of which I shall tell you." ³ So Abraham rose early in the morning, saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him, and his son Isaac. And he cut the wood for the burnt offering and arose and went to the place of which God had told him. ⁴ On the third day Abraham lifted up his eyes and saw the place from afar. ⁵ Then Abraham said to his young men, "Stay here with the donkey; I and the boy will go over there and worship and come again to you." ⁶ And Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering and laid it on Isaac his son. And he took in his hand the fire and the knife. So they went both of them together. ⁷ And Isaac said to his father Abraham, "My father!" And he said, "Here am I, my son." He said, "Behold, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a**

burnt offering?" ⁸ Abraham said, "God will provide for himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son." So they went both of them together. ⁹ ¶ When they came to the place of which God had told him, Abraham built the altar there and laid the wood in order and bound Isaac his son and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. ¹⁰ Then Abraham reached out his hand and took the knife to slaughter his son. ¹¹ But the angel of the LORD called to him from heaven and said, "Abraham, Abraham!" And he said, "Here am I." ¹² He said, "Do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him, for now I know that you fear God, seeing you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me." ¹³ And Abraham lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, behind him was a ram, caught in a thicket by his horns. And Abraham went and took the ram and offered it up as a burnt offering instead of his son. ¹⁴ So Abraham called the name of that place, "The LORD will provide"; as it is said to this day, "On the mount of the LORD it shall be provided."

This is God's Word. That God the Holy Spirit would grant us the gifts that he longs to give us through the study of these his holy words, so we pray, **"Sanctify us by your truth, O Lord. Your Word is truth!"** Amen.

Test, tempt, or natural consequence – those are our three options (possible explanations) every time we encounter adversity in our lives. In other words, every time something happens to us, we can think of it as God testing us, the devil tempting us, or just a random occurrence that is the result of natural consequences. To get a handle on this, start small and work your way up. You roll out of bed one morning late for work, stumble toward the bathroom and, a little off balance, brutally stub your little toe on the leg of your dresser. What just happened? Is God testing you in some way, is the devil tempting you, or was it just the natural consequence of your failure to watch where you're going? Without a divine revelation from God, there's really no way to tell, is there? No one can say, with any semblance of any sort of authority, that God was putting you to the test or that the devil was tempting you. The general rule of thumb for Christians is that if the Bible doesn't provide specific answers to certain questions in the Bible, that means we don't *need* specific answers to those questions. What we *do* know in every one of life's events is *what our reactions are supposed to look like*. That means that it doesn't matter if God caused you to stub your toe to test you, or if the devil was using it to tempt you, or if you just did something careless, our reaction is never supposed to be sinful. *Could* God be testing you? Sure. *Could* the devil be tempting you to sin?

Certainly. Could it be that neither God nor the devil caused you to stub your toe? Yes. *But my reaction doesn't depend on knowing exactly what just happened and why.* My reaction should not only be sinless, but positive and helpful. I could, for example, use the pain of stubbing my toe to remind me of the natural consequences of the fall of mankind. I could use it to remind me of the horror of having to stand faithless before my God on Judgment Day and to hear his pronouncement of endless torment. Or I could use it as a reminder to be more careful. All are appropriate reactions no matter what the cause of what just happened.

This probably seems a bit trivial when talking about something as relatively insignificant as stubbing your toe, but the point is to learn with the little things so that we don't fail with the big things. Instead of stubbing your toe, imagine that you were just hit by a drunk driver and find yourself paralyzed for life. Or, worse still, your spouse or child is hurt or killed. Suddenly it's no longer an insignificant question. In fact virtually every Christian who finds himself in such a crisis yearns desperately to know why. Why did this happen? Is God testing me? Is the devil tempting me? Is this just a random accident that we need to learn to expect in a world broken by sin?

The fact is there is almost never a clear answer as to why God's children suffer as they do. While we do know that God is the only one who determines when our time of grace will come to an end, and that God has promised to make all things work for the good of his children, we can almost never know with certainty why things happen as they do, nor God's perfect plan going forward. In the end, it really doesn't matter, *because our reaction is always supposed to be the same.* In all things we give glory to God, never doubting his wisdom, his love, or his power.

With that, we turn our attention to our text for this morning, which takes the general discussion to a whole different level. In fact I'm not sure that anyone here can easily grasp the depth and significance of the event described in our text. For starters, it's one thing to contemplate the random ups and downs of life that happen *to* us. It's another to consider something like that which is described in our text, where Abraham was told that he himself was to *do, carry out, or perpetrate* the horror. I would suggest that no one here has ever been confronted with anything like what we read in our text. It is one thing to know that God is in control, and to trust in his love, goodness, and wisdom no matter what happens to us in life. It is something altogether different to be told by God that we need to be the one to *create* or *bring about* the heartache, misery, or pain. Abraham was not just called by God to bear up under whatever hardship life might bring; he was called by God to bring about that terrible pain through his own actions.

Our text begins with something that is actually fairly rare, even in Bible times – a revelation of just *why* something was happening. The opening verse of our text said, **"After these things God tested Abraham."** This is rare in that we are here given inside information concerning exactly what *God* was himself doing. But note well that there is no indication that Abraham was told this. In fact it's hard to comprehend just exactly what would have been going through Abraham's mind when he was told by God to sacrifice his beloved son. Put yourself in his position. How could he be sure that this didn't actually come from Satan, masquerading as God? Remember, Isaac wasn't just any child; he was the child of promise. God had promised that Abraham's descendants would be as uncountable as the stars in the heavens or the sand on the seashore, and yet here that same God was telling Abraham to kill Isaac before his son had produced even one heir. *"Would God really make a promise,"* Abraham must have wondered, *"and then tell me to commit a heinous sin and thereby prevent that promise from being fulfilled?"* Beyond even the test of stabbing his own beloved son to death (something no sane human father could contemplate) this particular son represented the gospel promise itself. God had made clear to Abraham that the Messiah would come from his direct descendants, and yet God seemed to be telling him to end that greatest of all promises by killing his only son.

Yet in a tremendous display of blind faith, Abraham moved forward at God's command. We begin to get a sense of his faith already in verse 3: **"So Abraham rose early in the morning, saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him, and his son Isaac."** Note the **"early in the morning."** God told him to do the unthinkable, and he not only obeyed, he obeyed immediately. Another telling aspect of Abraham's faith is masked to a certain extent by our translation: ***Then Abraham said to his young men, "Stay here with the donkey; I and the boy will go over there and worship and come again to you."*** What's easy to miss is the fact that Abraham told his men that "we" will go worship, and then "we" will come back to you. Abraham's trust in his God was absolute, even in the face of apparently conflicting commands and promises. God had promised to multiply his descendants through Isaac, and that same God was now commanding him to kill that son and thereby destroy that earlier promise. Even when faced with this impossible dilemma, Abraham resolved to obey God's command, trusting that God could be trusted. He expressed that confidence by telling his servants, ***"We will come back to you."*** He did not understand *how* God would work this all out,

but he trusted that his faithful God would. He recognized that his job was simply to obey, and that *God would provide*.

That's the key in all of this, isn't it: *God will provide*. This was the rock on which Abraham's trust was built. He said as much to Isaac in our text: ***And Isaac said to his father Abraham, "My father!" And he said, "Here am I, my son." He said, "Behold, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?"*** ⁸ ***Abraham said, "God will provide for himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son."*** The situation that confronted Abraham was, by all human reckoning, absolutely impossible, and yet Abraham moved forward in the confidence that God knew what he was doing. He didn't require an explanation from God. He didn't insist that God share with him his master plan. That, he understood, was God's business. His was simply to obey.

And God provided.

Recognize here more than just a dramatic story with a happy ending, for here we see a picture of the gospel itself. When confronted with our own sins, and the need to provide an adequate sacrifice for those sins, then we are to answer as did Abraham: ***"God will provide for himself the lamb for a burnt offering."*** In our text, the killing of a man's own son represents the ultimate of what *man* could himself offer to God as a sin payment. Even though Abraham proved that he was willing to do even that, that sacrifice was still regarded by God as inadequate. The message we are to take from this is that there *is nothing that man can do to pay his own sin-debt*. No sacrifice provided by man could or would be adequate. God himself needed to provide the sacrifice. This he did in a most ironic twist. As we read in this morning's text, Abraham, the sinner, was not required to sacrifice his own son; God sacrificed his.

Therefore the greatest type or picture of Jesus to be found in our text is not Isaac – Abraham's only son who was *not* sacrificed – but the ram, that was sacrificed in his place. The ram is a picture of Jesus. The ram, provided by God alone, did nothing wrong. The ram, though innocent, was substituted as the sacrifice for man. And thereby the impossible problem that confronted every single sinner was solved by God alone. God provided.

Nor did God thereby provide just for others. He provided *your* sin payment for *you*. Each one of us then can rightly gain what we should from this lesson only when we first find ourselves as represented by Isaac. There you and I were bound by our sins on God's altar, helpless and condemned. But just then, when all seemed impossibly hopeless and when we had come to despair of any way out of the problem that we

ourselves had created by our sins, God himself provided his Son as the one great substitutionary sacrifice for our sins. God's Lamb was sacrificed, and you and I gained total and irrevocable forgiveness.

God help us now to learn to trust that as he so miraculously provided for us in the past, so he will certainly also provide for all our earthly and spiritual needs until he calls us home. God will provide. Amen.

Scripture Readings

^{ESV} **James 1:12-18** Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him. ¹³ Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am being tempted by God," for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one. ¹⁴ But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. ¹⁵ Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death. ¹⁶ Do not be deceived, my beloved brothers. ¹⁷ Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change. ¹⁸ Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creation.

^{ESV} **Mark 1:9-15** In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. ¹⁰ And when he came up out of the water, immediately he saw the heavens opening and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. ¹¹ And a voice came from heaven, "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased." ¹² The Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. ¹³ And he was in the wilderness forty days, being tempted by Satan. And he was with the wild animals, and the angels were ministering to him. ¹⁴ Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the gospel of God, ¹⁵ and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel."

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The First Sunday in Lent – February 18, 2018

The Opening Prayer by the Pastor

The Opening Hymn – 156 (Red Hymnal)

"Not All the Blood of Beasts"

The Order of Service – Supplement page 12ff. (Brown Hymnal)

The Scripture Lessons: (Printed on the back page of this bulletin)

The Epistle Lesson: (James 1:12-18) Our two Scripture readings, as we enter the season of Lent, deal with temptation. In our first lesson, the Holy Spirit through James assures us that God is never the author of temptation. The goal of temptation is always sin, and the goal of sin is the destruction of saving faith. James here reaffirms that temptation never comes from God by telling us that, on the contrary, from God comes only **"good and perfect gifts."** Temptation comes always and only from the devil, the sinful world, and our own sinful flesh.

Psalm 51 (Supplement page 28) (Brown Hymnal)

The New Testament Lesson: (Mark 1:9-15) Continuing with the general theme of temptation, we are here reminded that Jesus too was tempted. The difference, of course, is that those temptations were unsuccessful. Jesus resisted every such temptation by the power of the Word of God, which he had mastered from his youth. That same power, that same ability to resist temptation, is available to us still today on the pages of our Bibles. Thanks be to Jesus, not only for defeating our great enemy in our place, but for providing the example of how we too can successfully resist Satan and his minions.

The Confession of Faith -

The Apostolic Creed (Brown Hymnal page 15)

The Pre-Sermon Hymn – 141 (Red Hymnal)

"Enslaved by Sin and Bound in Chains"

The Sermon – Genesis 22:1-14 (Printed on the back page of this bulletin)

"God Himself Will Provide"

The Offertory – (Supplement page 16 insert)

The Post-Sermon Hymn – 145 (Red Hymnal)

"Jesus, Refuge of the Weary"

The Prayers

The Benediction

The Closing Hymn – 47 (Red Hymnal)

"Savior, Again to Thy Dear Name We Raise"

Silent Prayer

Welcome! - We warmly welcome any visitors who might be with us this morning and invite you to join us every Sunday at this time. St. Paul is a congregation in fellowship with the Church of the Lutheran Confession (CLC) – a conservative Lutheran synod with churches and missions throughout the United States, as well as Canada, India, and Africa. We are glad you are here. Thank you for letting us share the Word of God with you. Please record your visit in our Guest Book, and come again!

Attendance – Sunday (19) Ave (41) Wednesday (25)

This Week at St. Paul:

Today	-9:00 a.m.	– Sunday School and Bible Class
	-10:00 a.m.	– Worship Service
	-11:00 a.m.	– Fellowship Hour
Wednesday	-5:45 p.m.	– Confirmation Class
	-7:00 p.m.	– Midweek Lenten Service
Next Sunday	-9:00 a.m.	– Sunday School and Bible Class
	-10:00 a.m.	– Worship Service w/Communion
	-11:15 a.m.	– Fellowship Hour

CLC News – Pastor Caleb Schaller is considering the call to Luther Memorial of Fond du Lac, WI. Teacher Neal Bernthal is considering the call to Faith School of Markesan, WI. Teacher Andrew Roehl has returned the call to St. John's School of Clarkston, WA.

Church Council Notes – All six members of the Church Council were in attendance for the meeting on February 15. Treasurer McEnroe reported that General Fund contributions fell short of budgeted needs by \$2,266 in January, resulting in a General Fund deficit of \$661. Funds had to be borrowed from other accounts to pay the January bills. Trustee Coordinator Fettig reported that volunteers are needed for lawn mowing this summer. The Council is working on a cell phone policy that, when completed, will be signed by all employees, volunteers, and council members. A sign will be ordered identifying the offering box. Next Council meeting is March 11.

Easter Flowers – Remember to place your order for Easter flowers on the sign-up sheet located on the mailbox table.

Mission Trip - Missionary Todd Ohlmann is currently on an extended visit to our affiliates in Asia and Africa. He is joined on the trip by Missionary Peter Evensen, Pastor Tim Daub, and Missionary David Koenig. Follow their trip here: <http://missionaryohlmann.blogspot.nl/>.