

## Live Sacrificially

### Genesis 22:6-8

<sup>6</sup> Abraham 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, <sup>7</sup> Isaac 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?”

<sup>8</sup> Abraham answered, “God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son.” And the two of them went on together.

In the Global Status Report on Preventing Violence against Children 2020 the WHO, UNICEF and UN agencies stated that in Jamaica,

Bullying [and] victimization in the past 30 days/few months among 11–15 year olds was 26% for boys and 25% among girls. In terms of Involvement in physical fighting in the past 12 months among 13–15 year olds, data shows a prevalence of 44% among boys and 25% among girls.<sup>1</sup>

The 2020 report from these global organizations highlight the emphases of the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. To this end, the report notes,

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.unicef.org/media/70731/file/Global-status-report-on-preventing-violence-against-children-2020.pdf>

The Sustainable Development Goals contain a bold, ambitious and clear call to eliminate violence against children, and the Convention on the Rights of the Child includes a right to freedom from violence. This report is about the extent to which governments around the world are taking evidence-based actions to achieve these targets, and it provides a baseline against which governments can monitor their progress over the course of the next decade.<sup>2</sup>

These concerns occupied my mind as I prepared for this reflection. I am troubled by this text of the violence against Isaac in Genesis 22. I am aware that numerous interpretations have been done on this text, including the fact that we need to be cautious about reading our cultural practices into primitive culture. This reading is correct and is worthy of note. At the same time I am never at ease when it comes to reading this passage. Nevertheless, the theme for today, live sacrificially, becomes even more relevant when I think about the question by Isaac raised in the text I quoted earlier.

The writer of the book of Genesis places violence primarily in the hand of God. It is God who calls Abraham to leave the land of his ancestors and go to a foreign land. God changed his name from Abram (the high or exalted one) to Abraham (father of nations/multitudes) A change of name for Abraham means he is no

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.unicef.org/media/70731/file/Global-status-report-on-preventing-violence-against-children->

longer the exalted one. One exalted person exist and this is God. At the same time, though God reserves the right to conduct God's self violently or to commission others to act violently; this does not mean it is right to engage in violent activities. I wonder too, upon reflection, if God is not simply taking on a cultural phenomenon, violence, and seeking to transform it into a means of healing and reconciliation.

Let us use Isaac as a point of focus for this message of healing and reconciliation as reference for sacrificial living. To live sacrificially is one way to overcome violence. Isaac is pragmatic and perceptive about violence. He is pragmatic as he knows a knife and wood symbolize sacrifice. Preceding the sacrifice is killing an animal or bird. An animal or bird is needed to go along with the wood and the knife. Isaac however saw beyond the pragmatic. He was very perceptive. He knew his father was accustomed to offering sacrifice. One can therefore well imagine the trauma Isaac experienced when his father held him down on the wood and held up the knife. The trauma for both father and son became a sign of the extent to which our Father God and his Son Jesus will go to create a sacrifice for the sins of the world (John 3:16). In pursuit of healing and reconciliation of the people of Israel God called Abraham and Isaac to live sacrificially.

Abraham's response to his son Isaac's question is timeless. He says "God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son" (Gen. 22:8). Then the writer of Genesis says "And the two of them went on together." Isaac and Abraham walked together to the sacrifice as a sign of God's healing and reconciliation for father and son, for the people of Israel and for people of every generation. What does this mean for our theme **Live sacrificially**?

Fundamentally, the story of the attempted sacrifice of Isaac by Abraham points to the meaning of the story. It is what one writer describes as standing "before a God who asks everything, absolutely everything, of us" (Philippians 2:12–13).<sup>3</sup> This, my friends is essentially what it means to live sacrificially. It is total surrender to God who is love. Here we must admit that there does not seem to be much reference to a God of love in the attempted offering of the young boy Isaac as a sacrifice/offering. Here we must admit however to what some biblical commentators such as Phyllis Tribble (1984) and James Cone (2013) describe as texts of terror. This story about Abraham and Isaac is a passage infused with terror surrounding child sacrifice. At the same time the story points beyond itself

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.journeywithjesus.net/Essays/20140623JJ.shtml>

to God. It bears out the question raised by Isaac, “The fire and wood are here,” Isaac said, “but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?” This is the invitation to live sacrificially. It is an invitation to trust God even when things are not going in our favour.

The answer to Isaac’s question was not just in the ram that was in the bushes. Christians through the ages have testified of Jesus as the one who best represents what it means to live sacrificially. In the Collect we prayed earlier Jesus is referred to as “our cornerstone.” Jesus is the rock on which we live sacrificially. To live sacrificially therefore means two things. First, it is to be a disciple. A disciple is a follower but also a learner. It is to follow where God leads and to learn from our experiences. God meets us in daily experiences and wishes to teach us so we may learn new ways of being in relationship with God. Neither Abraham nor Isaac was the same after the encounter. Each grew in relationship with God and was strengthened to continue in service to God. Similarly, we who live sacrificially are to pay attention to our experiences and learn from them so we too will grow in relationship with God.

Second, to live sacrificially is to commit to make the world a better place. How do we make the world a better place? The answer is love. To love is to make the lives of children better than the way it is at present. The statistics I quoted at the beginning suggest violence against and among children is real. This violence can only be changed by love. Love is made real by those committed to live sacrificially.

We do not have to look too far to see that violence among our children is as real as the time of Abraham and Isaac. This suggests the inclination to hurt each other is real and is not limited to any age and time. The answer is to live sacrificially. It is commitment to live “before a God who asks everything, absolutely everything, of us.” Your presence this morning is an indication that you are willing to surrender to a God who asks everything of us. The question we need to ask ourselves this morning is this, what do I need to give up in order that I may live sacrificially?

Whatever our response maybe the invitation is to commit all our lives to God and do everything in our power and with the help of God to make the world a better place. In the name...