

“Do We Offer A Cup of Kindness?”

Genesis 22:1-14; Romans 6:12-23; Matthew 10:40-42

July 2, 2017 -- 13th ord.

Psalm 13

13:1 How long, O LORD? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me? 13:2 How long must I bear pain in my soul, and have sorrow in my heart all day long? How long shall my enemy be exalted over me? 13:3 Consider and answer me, O LORD my God! Give light to my eyes, or I will sleep the sleep of death, 13:4 and my enemy will say, "I have prevailed"; my foes will rejoice because I am shaken. 13:5 But I trusted in your steadfast love; my heart shall rejoice in your salvation. 13:6 I will sing to the LORD, because he has dealt bountifully with me.

Genesis 22:1-14 (NRSV) After these things God tested Abraham. He said to him, "Abraham!" And he said, "Here I am." {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 that I shall show 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; he cut the wood for the burnt offering, and set out and went to the place in the distance that God had shown him. {4} On the third day Abraham looked up and saw the place far away. {5} Then Abraham said to his young men, "Stay here with the donkey; the boy and I will go over there; we will worship, and then we will come back to you." {6} Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering and laid it on his son Isaac, and he himself carried the fire and the knife. So the two of them walked on together. {7} Isaac said to his father Abraham, "Father!" And he said, "Here I am, my son." He said, "The fire and the wood are here, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?" {8} Abraham said, "God himself will provide the lamb for a burnt offering, my son." So the two of them walked on together. {9} When they came to the place that God had shown him, Abraham built an altar there and laid the wood in order. He bound his son Isaac, and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. {10} Then Abraham reached out his hand and took the knife to kill his son. {11} But the angel of the LORD called to him from heaven, and said, "Abraham, Abraham!" And he said, "Here I am." {12} He said, "Do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him; for now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me." {13} And Abraham looked up and saw a ram, caught in a thicket by its horns. Abraham went and took the ram and offered it up as a burnt offering instead of his son. {14} So Abraham called that place "The LORD will provide"; as it is said to this day, "On the mount of the LORD it shall be provided."

Romans 6:22-23 (NRSV) {22} But now that you have been freed from sin and enslaved to God, the advantage you get is sanctification. The end is eternal life. {23} For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Matthew 10:40-42 (NRSV) "Whoever welcomes you welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me. {41} Whoever welcomes a prophet in the name of a prophet will receive a prophet's reward; and whoever welcomes a righteous person in the name of a righteous person will receive the reward of the righteous; {42} and whoever gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones in the name of a disciple--truly I tell you, none of these will lose their reward.

The old man takes a rag from his bag and wipes away the sweat and grime from his leathery weathered face. He and his young son stand at the foot of the hill. For three days he had hoped that God would tell him to turn around and go home. God had not. At the top of the hill is the place God wanted him to go -- it is the place of sacrifice -- though he does not understand how God could demand this of him he has come this far and will continue. His throat is parched, not so much from the travel as from the task. He tells his helpers to stay where they are, he and the boy will go to worship.

Be still, my soul; the Lord is on your side;

Bear patiently the load of grief or pain;

Leave to your God to order and provide;

In every change God faithful will remain.

Be still, my soul; your best, your heavenly, Friend

Through thorny ways leads to a joyful end.

The boy, innocent of any offense, does as his father instructs. The wood of the sacrifice is placed on his back. The burden is great as they trek upward. The boy, naturally, inquires about the lamb for sacrifice and his aged father replies, "God will provide..."

The old man, who went so eagerly when God called, who packed up everything and left the land of his ancestors in pursuit of a mysterious land, looks up that hill, looks around for some sign of God's presence. For how long now, how long has he done all God has asked, left everything behind, put his life in the

hands of his enemies, faced the desert heat by day and frigid cold by night, watched the old woman draw into herself when the other one gave him a son and then her laughing bewilderment when God promised them a son – this son – Isaac – the laughing boy – no one is laughing now. His spirit is in turmoil with a decision he must make, how can he make this sacrifice? But -- without objection he trudges up the hill beside him to – to – what..... God will provide.

Be still, my soul; your God doth undertake

To guide the future as God has the past.

Your hope, thy confidence, let nothing shake;

All now mysterious shall be bright at last.

Be still, my soul; the rains and winds still know

God's voice who ruled them while God dwelt below.

The father watches his son, stagger under the weight of his burden. He watches as it is laid down and the sacrifice, the dread sacrifice is prepared. He wonders if there is any other way. The son wonders if there is any other way. And God provides -- a perfect sacrificial lamb – a paschal lamb. (pause) The hammers strike their blows. The cross is raised to the sky. The sky turns black. The sacrifice is made. And we are redeemed.

The ancient story of a father asked to sacrifice his son for no apparent reason other than to be 'righteous' makes us more than a little uneasy. We find sweet relief when God stays the hand lifted high to strike the fatal blow and then for us, provides the foreshadowing lamb in the thicket In the thicket of human

sinfulness...caught in the brambles of the wages of our sin, which is death...and God provides for us, in the unstayed sacrifice of his son, Jesus, our gift of life. Now and forever.

Be still, my soul, as sin and death doth part

And all is darkened in the way of tears;

Then shall we better know His love, His heart,

Who comes to soothe thy sorrows and thy fears.

Be still, my soul; your Jesus can repay

with His own life all sin He takes away.

What do we do with this? What do we do with the knowledge of God's sacrifice of an only son – for us? How do we fathom this love? Abraham left everything and followed God to that mysterious promised land with peril at every turn, none more terrifying than the demand of his son's life; the psalmist cries 'how long O lord, How long must I bear pain in my soul, and have sorrow in my heart all day long? How long shall my enemy be exalted over me?' Paul, converted persecutor of the followers of the way reminds us that the wages, the earnings, what we deserve for our sinfulness is death.

But God provides the lamb. God's steadfast love causes the psalmist to rejoice because God has dealt bountifully with him; and the debt for our sin is offset by the free gift of eternal life in Christ.

What do we do with that? Even when we feel pressed upon in our living to make sacrifice? Even when the burden of life, of illness, injury, anxiety, fear, or

grief stretch us to the limits of our endurance? Even when it is not convenient for us to squeeze another moment in our precious schedule for God's call to us to serve?

What do we do with that? When the 'other' offends us? When we are 'out of sorts?' When we get tired of looking around us for what we think, what we hope, what we demand to be some provision from God?

What do we do with the knowledge, the truth, the reality of what God in Christ has done for us? What Abraham like faith are we willing to display?

Just for today, as complex as the solution is, as deeply theological as the sacrifice is, as challenging as our faith is.... Let's keep it simple.

How do we respond to God's love for us? Just for today forget all the 'we should's,' we ought to's and even the commands. The demand for sacrifice on our part.

For today let's reduce the gospel to this – a cup of cold water. We know how good that is! Hot, tired, dusty, smoky throated – you come in from 95 degree heat and pour that crystal clear, ice tinkling, instant condensation on the glass, cup of pure liquid bliss – and feel the moment, the stress, the heat, the dry, the grime, the pain, the sorrow, the doubt, the anxiety flow down your chilled throat.... Ahhhh! You lick your lips and you want more. You hold the glass up to your brow and feel your troubles melt away along with the cubes of ice. As simple as it is – there is nothing much better.

Jesus tells us, in a funny little way, that this is the essence of our response

to his love. A cup of cold water. A metaphorical cup of cold water relief that:

Recognizes need, that says I'm sorry, that expresses concern, that offers a blessing, that alleviates pain, that lifts the spirits, that bestows sympathy, that articulates solidarity, that replaces enmity with equity, that substitutes anger with forgiveness, that gives the benefit of the doubt, that stresses non-violence, that expects nothing in return, that confides confidence, that relays reliance, that creates catharsis, that models moderation, that exhibits ecstatic exuberant expectation, that portrays patience, that absorbs avarice, that defies death, that becomes Jesus in a glass. A cup of cold water is thousands and thousands of moments of kindness and personal sacrifice no one knows about....Well we understand don't we...

A cup of cold water is a roof and meal for people who don't have either/, a cup of cold water is a jar of jelly in a basket for ACS/, a cup of cold water is a backpack filled with sustenance for a school child/ a cup of cold water is a faithful regular gift to offset poverty in Haiti/, a cup of cold water is a card received in the mail that expresses sympathy, or concern, or just friendship;/ a cup of cold water is a moment of swallowing pride, denying personal injury and initiating reconciliation;/ a cup of cold water is gathering for worship, sharing fellowship, doing mission,/ a cup of cold water in a hand extended by people who care/ a couple of cold water is putting on the best VBS you can produce/ A cup of cold water is giving a cupful of grace... a cupful of hope....a cupful of peace....a cupful of faith...a cupful of promise ...a cupful of sincere concern in the face of

great loss... as a church it is what we do with God's grace filled provision so abundant in our living... but what about out there?

Here on July 2 with the 4th a couple of days off how do we as citizens of a great nation, for whom God has provided in great abundance, respond, if indeed we are, as the pledge reminds us, 'one nation under God?' We climbed the hill, what are we willing to sacrifice? Where is the metaphorical cup of cold water for 22 million more who are about to be without healthcare?; where is the refreshing chill of an icy sip for those about to be deported for whom there is no hospitality available in this great land? Where is the welcome of Jesus for the tired and poor huddled masses yearning to be free that the beacons statue declares is the essence of America? Where will that crystal clear cup of water be when in favor of business we stand by and allow environmental protections to be summarily dismissed as a hindrance to commerce?

Up there on that mountain Abraham had a terrible decision to make. He had to decide if he was going to be faithful to God and make that sacrifice. What are we willing to sacrifice? Why have we not learned that in the giving of the cup of water it is God who provides? It is almighty God, our sovereign God who provides the true security, the true peace. /// Does this table set in our midst with tiny cups of grace and the bread of heaven mean nothing to us? It's time to decide. Before it's too late. Before we lose our souls to another zero on the sum on the bottom line. May the grace of this table remind us that it is God who provides.

Be still, o souls; a cup of grace bestow

Then we shall be forever like our Lord,

Tell disappointment, grief, and fear to go,

Sorrow forget, love's purest joys restore.

Be still, O souls; when change and tears are past,

All safe and blessed we shall meet at last.