

**“TESTING.....TESTING.....TESTING”**

**A SERMON BASED ON THE OLD TESTAMENT BOOK OF GENESIS (22:1-14) AND PRESENTED FOR ORLEAN UMC ON JUNE 28, 2020----- (THE FOURTH SUNDAY OF A SIX WEEK SERMON SERIES THAT WILL TAKE US THROUGH SOME OF THE MAJOR THEMES IN THE BOOK OF GENESIS)**

I NEVER LIKED EXAMS.....NEVER  
HAVE....PROBABLY NEVER WILL.....I SUPPOSE  
THAT I AM ONE OF THOSE PEOPLE THAT HAS  
“TEST-ITIS” WHEN IT COMES TO TAKING TESTS....  
I DIDN'T LOOK FORWARD TO FINALS WEEK IN  
SCHOOL AND DREADED EXAM TIME IN  
SEMINARY----- I DON'T LIKE EXAMINATIONS BY  
DOCTORS..... I DON'T EVEN LIKE THOSE  
ELECTRONIC TESTS THEY DO ON YOUR  
AUTOMOBILE ENGINES.

I'M ALWAYS AFRAID IT'S GOING TO COST ME A LOT OF MONEY.....THAT SOMETHING THAT SEEMS TO BE WORKING JUST FINE TODAY IS NEAR TOTAL COLLAPSE TOMORROW..... IN MY YOUNGER YEARS THE TEST THAT SCARRED ME THE MOST WAS WHEN I HAD TO DRIVE TO QUALIFY FOR MY DRIVER'S LICENSE. I WAS INTIMIDATED, NERVOUS AND AFRAID OF FAILING.....BUT SOMEHOW I HELD IT TOGETHER AND PASSED.....GOT MY LICENSE AND MY WORLD TOTALLY CHANGED.....

THERE CERTAINLY HAVE BEEN OTHER TIMES OF TESTING.....RELATIONSHIP TESTING AND PARENTING TESTING AND I RECALL VERY CLEARLY THE TESTING AND HURDLES THAT I ENDURED AS A SEVENTEEN YEAR OLD IN NAVY BOOT CAMP.....LOOKING BACK TODAY I SEE THAT NONE OF THE TESTS --- TAKEN ON THEIR OWN MERIT----WERE PARTICULARLY DAUNTING OR CHALLENGING OR EVEN IMPRESSIVE ----AND NOW OF COURSE I RECOGNIZE THAT THEY WERE ALL IN PLACE TO TEACH CHARACTER AND DISCIPLINE.....BUT AS A RAW KID AWAY FROM INDIANA AND ON MY OWN FOR THE FIRST TIME...THEY WERE MONUMENTAL

**FEAR OF FAILURE....FEAR OF COMPLETING THE TEST.....FAILURE OF MAKING IT THROUGH BOOT CAMP DOMINATED EVERY MOMENT OF OUR BOOT CAMP EXPERIENCE.....BUT LIKE THE DRIVER'S TEST....MY COMPANY OF RECRUITS MADE IT THROUGH AND ULTIMATELY WE WENT OUT TO SERVE OUR SERVICE AND OUR COUNTRY IN ANY NUMBER OF CAPACITIES.....**

**NOW LET ME ASK YOU.....DO YOU HAVE "TEST-ITIS?" DO YOU FEAR THOSE MOMENTS IN LIFE WHEN YOU HAVE TO MAKE A DECISION? MORE IMPORTANTLY, DO YOU HAVE FAITH THAT THE DECISIONS YOU MAKE ARE THE RIGHT ONES?**

NO STORY HAS PUZZLED PEOPLE OF THE FAITH MORE THAN THIS STORY..... WHY WOULD A LOVING GOD TEST A MAN'S FAITH WITH THE SACRIFICE OF HIS SON? THE WHOLE INCIDENT SEEMS STRANGE..... I CAN'T IMAGINE BEING IN A SITUATION WHERE I WAS ASKED TO SACRIFICE ONE OF MY CHILDREN.

SOME SCHOLARS BELIEVE THAT THE VOICE THAT TOLD ABRAHAM TO SLAY HIS SON WAS NOT THE VOICE OF GOD. PERHAPS ABRAHAM WAS LISTENING TO THE VOICE OF CULTURE.

AT THE TIME HUMAN SACRIFICE WAS A COMMON PRACTICE..... MAYBE GOD WANTED THIS STORY HERE TO MAKE A STATEMENT THAT HUMAN SACRIFICE WAS ALL WRONG AND THEREFORE INTERVENED TO STOP IT.

I SUPPOSE THAT IS A POSSIBILITY BUT I THINK IT MAY BE JUST ANOTHER WAY OF RATIONALIZING THE STORY TO SOMEHOW MAKE SENSE OF WHAT HAPPENED..... BUT....LET'S BE HONEST.....SINCE WHEN DOES GOD MAKE SENSE? REMEMBER THIS IS THE SAME GOD WHO GAVE A SON TO ABRAHAM AND SARAH IN THEIR OLD AGE. THAT STORY WAS ABSURD, JUST AS THIS ONE IS.

**YES....SOMETIMES GOD IS PORTRAYED AS  
WILDLY UNREASONABLE .....SOMETIMES THE  
VOICE OF GOD SOMETIMES CALLS US TO  
ABSURDITY..... THIS WAS THE SAME GOD WHO  
TOLD NOAH TO BUILD AN ARK ON DRY LAND.  
THIS IS THE SAME GOD THAT WILL LEAD THE  
ISRAELITES ACROSS THE RED SEA. THIS IS THE  
SAME GOD THAT WILL DELIVER HIS SON, VIA THE  
HOLY SPIRIT, IN THE LITTLE OBSCURE TOWN OF  
BETHLEHEM.**

**THE GOD OF ABSURDITY PUTS ABRAHAM TO THIS HORRIFIC TEST..... FORTUNATELY, HE PASSED AND THE STORY HAD A HAPPY ENDING.**

***GOD'S TEST OF ABRAHAM HAD TO BE ONE WHERE THERE COULD BE NO QUESTION ABOUT HIS FAITH. GOD NEEDED ABRAHAM AS A LEADER AND GOD HAD TO DETERMINE WHETHER OR NOT ABRAHAM WAS UP TO THE TEST.***



**BUT ABRAHAM IS NOT ACTING ON BLIND FAITH.  
GOD HAS ALREADY DEMONSTRATED THE  
IMPOSSIBLE BY GIVING HIM ISAAC, HIS FIRST  
BORN SON, AND FOLLOWED THROUGH ON THAT  
PROMISE..... GOD MADE A COVENANT WITH  
NOAH AND PROMISED ABRAHAM LAND AND  
DESCENDANTS.**

**THIS STORY IS DIFFICULT FOR US TO  
COMPREHEND SINCE IT APPEARS TO PUT  
ABRAHAM'S SON, ISAAC, IN GRAVE DANGER.**

PERSONALLY-----I DON'T BELIEVE THAT GOD  
EVER INTENDED THAT ANY HARM WOULD COME  
TO ISAAC..... GOD COULD HAVE INTERVENED AT  
ANY POINT ALONG THE WAY..... WHY GOD  
CREATED THIS SCENARIO IS OFFENSIVE TO US,  
BUT THEN SOMETIMES THE ONLY WAY GOD CAN  
GET OUR ATTENTION IS TO DO THE IMPOSSIBLE,  
THE ABSURD, THE RIDICULOUS.

WHEN PEOPLE ASK ME WHY I'M IN THE  
MINISTRY, I LOOK BACK AND OFTEN WONDER  
MYSELF. AS I HAVE SHARED WITH YOU  
BEFORE....GOD TAPPED ME ON THE SHOULDER  
AND SAID THAT IT WAS TIME FOR ME TO  
FOLLOW.....

THIS AFTER 32 YEARS WITH THE DEPARTMENT  
OF THE NAVY IN ONE CAPACITY OR  
ANOTHER.....TEN YEARS AS THE DIRECTOR OF  
ACCOUNTING AT A LOCAL MEDICAL PRACTICE  
.....A GUY WITH A MIDDLE AMERICA HERITAGE  
AND VALUE SYSTEM .....A GUY WHO WAS  
TOTALLY UNCHURCHED.....CHALLENGES .....A  
COMFORT ZONE THREATENED AND SHAKEN TO  
ITS CORE BY THIS “JESUS THING” BY THIS  
“FAITH THING” .....TALK ABOUT TESTING!!!!.....

WHAT ABRAHAM DEMONSTRATED IN THIS STORY IS A COMPLETE SURRENDER OF THE WILL..... ABRAHAM PROCEEDED AS INSTRUCTED, WITHOUT HESITATION, WITHOUT COMPLAINING, WITHOUT DEBATE. ABRAHAM ACCEPTED THE CHALLENGE, AND ULTIMATELY PASSED HIS TEST.....

ONE WONDERS WHY ABRAHAM WOULD EVEN CONSIDER SUCH AN ABSURD EXAM. BUT, IT NEVER OCCURRED TO ABRAHAM THAT GOD WOULD NOT PROVIDE FOR HIM.... ABRAHAM PROCEEDED BECAUSE HE TRUSTED IN GOD COMPLETELY.

**NOTICE THAT ABRAHAM RESPONDED TO GOD BY SAYING, “HERE I AM.” HE WAS READY AND WILLING AS HE RESPONDED TO THE CALL.**

***FOR ABRAHAM, THERE WERE NO EXCUSES. THERE IS NO OTHER AGENDA. GOD CALLED, ABRAHAM RESPONDED. HE PREPARED HIMSELF FOR THE JOURNEY AND PROCEEDED. HE DIDN'T LOOK AT HIS APPOINTMENT BOOK OR ASK HIS FAMILY IF THEY HAD PLANS. HE DIDN'T HAVE TO THINK IT OVER OR SLEEP ON IT. HE DIDN'T SAY, “I’LL GET BACK TO YOU.” HE DIDN'T SAY, “YOU KNOW I’D REALLY LIKE TO, BUT...”***

**WHAT GOD WANTED WAS ABRAHAM'S  
ABSOLUTE COMMITMENT AND UNQUALIFIED  
FAITH AND ABRAHAM CAME THROUGH WITH  
FLYING COLORS.**

**NOTICE ALSO THAT WHEN ISAAC QUESTIONED  
HIS FATHER ABOUT THE LAMB, ABRAHAM TOLD  
HIM (VERSE 8) THAT "GOD WOULD PROVIDE THE  
LAMB FOR THE BURNT OFFERING." ----ABRAHAM  
HAD COMPLETE FAITH IN GOD THAT WHATEVER  
RESOURCES WERE NECESSARY FOR THE  
MISSION WOULD BE AVAILABLE. THERE WAS NO  
REASON TO WORRY SINCE GOD WOULD  
PROVIDE FOR ALL HIS NEEDS.**

FINALLY, IT IS NOT ENOUGH THAT ABRAHAM JUST BELIEVED IN GOD..... ABRAHAM HAS TO MAKE THE JOURNEY, HE HAS TO GO THE DISTANCE. THIS IS ILLUSTRATED BY THE FACT THAT THEY TRAVEL FOR THREE DAYS..... AND GOD DIDN'T INTERVENE UNTIL THE VERY LAST MOMENT WHEN ABRAHAM REACHED FOR THE KNIFE. GOD HAD SEEN ENOUGH. GOD WAS CONVINCED THAT ABRAHAM COULD BE TRUSTED. FOR IT WAS THEN THAT THE ANGEL OF GOD SAID, "FOR NOW I KNOW THAT YOU FEAR GOD."

**ARE WE WILLING TO GO THE DISTANCE FOR OUR FAITH? FOR ABRAHAM, GOING THE DISTANCE MEANT TAKING A TEST WHICH COULD HAVE HAD DIRE CONSEQUENCES. IT MEANT TRUSTING IN GOD, WHO IN THE PAST HAD MADE EXTRAORDINARY REQUESTS FROM OTHER LEADERS OF THE FAITH, LIKE NOAH.**

**IT MEANT BELIEVING THAT GOD WOULD PROVIDE ALL OF HIS NEEDS. IT MEANT THAT THE GOD OF ABSURDITY WOULD CALL HIM TO OTHER RIDICULOUS TASKS IN THE FUTURE.**



ARE WE UP TO SUCH A TEST? I BELIEVE THAT  
MOST OF US ARE CREATURES OF HABIT AND  
STRIVE TO BE COMFORTABLE WITH THE STATUS  
QUO..... WE DON'T LIKE IT WHEN WE ARE ASKED  
TO DO THINGS "OUTSIDE THE BOX." -----WE  
DON'T WANT TO BE DIFFERENT..... WE DON'T  
WANT TO BE KNOWN AS PEOPLE WHO DO  
CRAZY THINGS..... WE DON'T LIKE RISKS AND WE  
DON'T LIKE TO LOSE..... WE WOULD RATHER  
KNOW WHAT'S ON THE EXAM IN ADVANCE OR  
FIND THE VERY EASIEST WAY ----THE WAY WITH  
THE FEWEST TESTS FOR SURE ----TO JOURNEY  
THROUGH LIFE.

LATER THIS WEEK WE WILL AGAIN CELEBRATE  
THE FOURTH OF JULY.....ALTHOUGH THAT  
CELEBRATION WILL BE DIFFERENT THIS YEAR  
FOR MANY IF NOT MOST OF US -----

*I SEEM TO REMEMBER THAT SOME VERY INSANE  
REVOLUTIONARIES DECIDED TO TAKE ON  
MOTHER ENGLAND AND FIGHT FOR  
INDEPENDENCE. THEY WERE GREATLY  
OUTNUMBERED, LACKED TRAINING AND  
RESOURCES AND THEIR GOVERNMENT WAS  
FRAGILE AND UNORGANIZED. YET, THEY  
PREVAILED. THEY PASSED THE TEST BECAUSE  
THEY WERE COMMITTED AND HAD FAITH THAT  
WHAT THEY WERE FIGHTING FOR WAS RIGHT.*

WE ALL HAVE DREAMS, BELIEFS AND GOALS  
THAT ARE NEVER REACHED BECAUSE WE FAIL  
TO LIVE UP TO THE TEST..... GOD WANTS US TO  
HAVE FAITH AND SUPPORT THAT FAITH WITH  
COMMITMENT..... GOD WANTS US TO TRUST  
THAT GOD WILL PROVIDE FOR US IN THE  
FUTURE JUST AS GOD HAS PROVIDED FOR US IN  
THE PAST..... GOD WANTS US TO HEED THE CALL  
TO SERVICE EVEN WHEN THE VOICE WE HEAR  
MAKES NO SENSE.

ARE YOU LISTENING FOR THAT CALL? ARE YOU  
READY?

**PRAISE GOD AND MAY IT BE SO FOR YOU AND**  
**FOR ME.....AMEN**