

July 2, 2017 – The Akedah

Genesis 22: 1-14

First, let me say that there is really only one honest reaction to this story and that is horror and disgust. What other reaction could there possibly be to the planned sacrifice of a human being and, in particular, one's own son? What other reaction could there be to a God that would ask a father to consider such a sacrifice?

I must admit I have struggled all week trying to decide what I could possibly say about this passage that would be meaningful in today's world. In my search, I found a quote from a well-respected Methodist preacher, named John Holbert, who wrote, "In short, this story has become for me far too terrible to use in an act of preaching. Never again will I preach a sermon based on this story, unless I use it to repudiate its horrors in as stark and powerful a way as I can conjure up." <http://www.patheos.com/Progressive-Christian/Nasty-Little-Tale-John-Holbert-06-23-2014> Well ignoring the story, making believe that it doesn't exist, is certainly a legitimate plan of action.

But it does exist and it is one of the passages for this Sunday, so I have chosen to have it read in today's service. This story is a part of the written history of the Hebrew people. Like so many other stories in the Hebrew Scriptures, it is a reflection of the culture and the religion of those ancient times. We know that human sacrifice, including the sacrifice of children, was a part of many ancient

religions in the Middle East. I even found an author who suggested that human sacrifice was, until six or seven hundred years before the birth of Jesus, an acceptable part of the Hebrew religion as well. http://www.huffingtonpost.com/valerie-tarico/polytheism-and-human-sacr_b_777340.html

Some Jewish and Christian scholars argue that since God sent an angel to stop the killing of Isaac that means that the Hebrew God did not require human sacrifice. They cling to the first verse where it says, “God tested Abraham.” These scholars suggest that it was “just a test” and God never really wanted Abraham to kill his son. In fact, the traditional Hebrew name for this story is “The Akedah” which means “The Binding.” Rather than referring to this passage as “The Sacrifice of Isaac,” the rabbis called it “The Binding of Isaac.” Yes, they argue, Isaac was tied up like a sheep ready to be slaughtered but he was never going to be killed. It was just a test. But what kind of God would test a father in that way? I believe that only a God who required human sacrifice would even suggest such a test. <http://www.theologicalstew.com/abraham-this-is-a-test.html>
http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=2138

The history of every country and every group of people is about change and one of the changes that has taken place over the centuries is our understanding of God. The God of Abraham was a cruel manipulator who deliberately created mass destruction with a flood, who destroyed the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, and who asked fathers to sacrifice their children. This was the God that the Hebrew people of that time worshipped. It is not necessary for Jewish and Christian scholars to twist the truth of those ancient times and try to make it fit

our modern morals. All we can do is lament the past, live in the present and dream and work for the future.

This weekend we are celebrating the 150th Anniversary of Canada's confederation. Yesterday, Swift Current had a parade, a flag raising ceremony with cake and hot dogs, a concert and fireworks. There was a display at the museum called "Saskatchewan's Road to Confederation," a photo exhibit at the Art Gallery called "Oh Canada: The View From Here," and another photo exhibit at West Wing Gallery called "A Rightful Place – The Face of Saskatchewan Newcomers." There were lots of ways to celebrate and many ways to remember the proud history of our wonderful country.

But, even as we celebrated, there were many people in our province and in our country who were unable or unwilling to take part. Many of our Indigenous neighbours rightly point out that this land has been occupied for much longer than 150 years. They find it hard to celebrate a country where their people have experienced the tragic impact of assimilation, colonization and colonialism.

<http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/ottawa/parliament-hill-indigenous-ceremony-june-29-1.4180411>

Many people of Chinese descent see July 1st as Humiliation Day. It was July 1st, 1923 when the Chinese Exclusion Act was put into place, an act that banned nearly all Chinese immigrants from entering Canada and caused families to be separated from their loved ones for years.

It is important that even as we celebrate 150 years of confederation, we also recognize those parts of our history that we would rather forget. The General Secretary of The United of Canada, Nora Sanders, sent out an email this week in which she wrote:

Some voices have questioned why we should celebrate Canada 150 at all when our nation's relationship with the Indigenous peoples of this land is still so flawed. Another way of looking at it would be that we could use this occasion to remember all our history, the good and the bad, and to celebrate the things we are proud of, and commit to do better on the rest.

<http://www.united-church.ca/blogs/round-table/our-reconciliation-journey-continues>

The good news is that our beliefs have changed and are continuing to change. We now believe in a God of love instead of the often cruel and destructive God found in the book of Genesis. We now have the report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and we have begun to realize the impact of the Residential School System. Our government has apologized to several minority groups who have been treated unfairly over the years. On Thursday, Justin Trudeau, when asked about the Indigenous group on Parliament Hill, said "it was understandable that not all are celebrating equally. 'We recognize that over the past decades, generations, indeed centuries, Canada has failed Indigenous peoples.'" <http://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/trudeau-visits-reoccupation-teepee-1.4185758>

So while we celebrate all that is good in this wonderful country of ours, let us also acknowledge and lament the painful parts of our history. May we find strength and encouragement from the God of our time, the Spirit of Love and Peace, as we move forward on a path to reconciliation and a future where all Canadians, receive the benefit of the abundance of this nation.