

“God Will Provide...”

*And Isaac said to his father... “Behold, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?”
Abraham said, “God will provide for himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son” (Genesis 22:7-8).*

Writers employ many techniques in order to tell a good story, but one of the most common and effective tools is foreshadowing. Foreshadowing is a literary device used to give hints about what will happen later in the story. It’s like a road sign that points the reader ahead to an important event yet to come. From classics like *Romeo and Juliet* (where Shakespeare writes in the opening lines: “From forth the fatal loins of these two foes, A pair of star-cross’d lovers take their life”) to pop-culture hits like “*Star Wars*” (where Obi-Wan Kenobi comments to Anakin Skywalker, “You will be the death of me”) foreshadowing is used to create a unifying thread that runs through the story and illuminate an important theme or development in the plot.

The Bible also includes rich examples of foreshadowing that continually draw our eyes to the larger story. From the first promise of the Messiah in Genesis 3:15, to the prophecies that reveal a virgin mother (Isaiah 7:14) and the very location of His miraculous birth (Micah 5:2), the entire Old Testament is a tapestry of divine foreshadowing designed to reveal God’s saving purpose and plan in Christ. And nowhere is this seen more boldly than in today’s reading from Genesis.

Listen again to the language of this text. In verse two, God tells Abraham to sacrifice his son – *his one and only Son*. Not only does this command draw a straight line to the sacrifice of *God’s one and only Son*, but even the location to which God directs Abraham is an unmistakable reference to the future. Mount Moriah would later become the location of Jerusalem, where countless sacrifices were offered for the sins of God’s people, and ultimately where the Cross of Christ would be lifted above the earth. And the examples of divine foreshadowing only build from there. Isaac himself carries the wood that will serve as the instrument of the sacrifice; and, just as a sheep before his shearer’s is silent (a phrase Isaiah uses to describe the passion of Christ), Isaac also obeys his father’s instructions without objection or complaint; then, in the most dramatic example of divine foreshadowing, God Himself stops Abraham from sacrificing his son and provides a ram as a substitute, to die in Isaac’s place. Finally, our text ends with God renewing His promise that through Isaac’s descendants, “all nations of the earth (would) be blessed” (Genesis 22:18).

It all seems so clear, and yet, as we reflect on this reading from Genesis, we have to understand that you can only identify foreshadowing if you know how the story ends. *We* read this account in the light of the New Testament. *We know* how the story unfolded. *We know* how God kept His promises to Abraham in the life, death and resurrection of His Son Jesus, and with this knowledge, it’s easy to simply analyze the different examples of foreshadowing in this account and miss the truly startling story it tells.

The truth is, by any reasonable standard, Abraham was given an impossible task, and first, we have to confront the horrifying truth of God’s command. God tells Abraham to sacrifice his son, and this isn’t the kind of sacrifice we see later with Hannah who dedicates her son Samuel to serve in the tabernacle; Abraham is called to end his son’s life and to sacrifice him as a burnt offering. The Hebrew word used here helps us to better understand the shocking nature of God’s command. The term for “burnt sacrifice” is “holah” – it’s where we get the word “holocaust.” It’s an ancient word which means to “completely massacre” and Abraham understood what it meant. So, Abraham was called to kill his own son. Yet, for Abraham, an equally troubling aspect of God’s command to sacrifice Isaac was tied to his miraculous birth and to the promise God had given Abraham about this boy.

In Genesis 15, God told Abraham (then Abram) that his descendants would be as numerous as the stars in the sky, and then, in Genesis 17, God promised Abraham that he and his wife Sarah would have a son...and this promise was beyond reason. Abraham was 99 years old and Sarah was 90 and physically unable to bear children, and yet this is what God told them. And then, to underscore the importance of this miracle baby, God also told them that through the line of their son, all families of the earth would be blessed *AND* God’s

everlasting covenant would be established through Isaac (Genesis 12:3; 17:19). So, not only was this command to sacrifice Isaac morally reprehensible, this son – this one and only son, this son like no other – was tied to God’s promise to deliver the world.

All of these facts were at play as Abraham processed God’s command and, without the Biblical hindsight that we enjoy – without knowing how the story ended – Abraham’s mind must have been swirling with questions, and the temptation must have been overwhelming. And this is why Abraham’s story matters to us! We’ve all experienced times when life seems to unravel; when we are faced with burdens that seem unbearable; when we find ourselves in impossible situations...and yet, what we need to hear today is that none of these things change the promises of God. This is true for us...and it was also true for Abraham.

In Romans 4, Paul tells us that, “Abraham believed God and it was counted to him as righteousness” (Romans 4:3). *Abraham believed God.* Abraham believed that the Lord would keep His promises; that just as He had given them this son through a barren womb, God would keep His promise to make Abraham’s descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky, and that through this son, Isaac, God would bless all of the families on the earth; that through this one and only son, God would keep His everlasting covenant to save His people. These were God’s promises, and Abraham believed God. And so, by faith, not by sight, we are told that, “Abraham rose early in the morning” and followed the Word of the Lord, trusting that God would provide a way out of an impossible situation. Abraham believed God and so can we.

The root of all temptation is to doubt the promises of God. This is the temptation Abraham faced as he made his way to Mount Moriah, it’s the temptation Jesus faced when Satan assaulted Him in the wilderness, and it’s the temptation we face every day when the sins of our own flesh and the circumstances of this sinful world seem to contradict everything God has told us. The truth is that our sin *is* real and we *are* in trouble, and yet, God’s promises remain and God continues to point us ahead. In the divine foreshadowing of His Word and Sacraments, God continually reveals the thread that runs through the story, straight to the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. This thread is the saving promise that God made to Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden; it’s the saving promise that He spoke to Noah and Abraham, and through Moses and the Prophets; and it’s the same promise that He made to you in the waters of your Baptism and that, today, you receive in His Body and Blood.

God’s promises always remain! Because this is true, as they made their way up the mountain, Isaac said to his father Abraham, “Behold, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?” And Abraham said, “God will provide for himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son” (Genesis 22:7-8). Without the benefit of hindsight and completely by faith, Abraham held onto the promise of God, even in the face of death. The writer of Hebrews comments on this amazing story saying, “By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises was in the act of offering up his only son, of whom it was said, ‘Through Isaac shall your offspring be named.’ (Because) He considered that God was able even to raise him from the dead...” (Hebrews 11:17-19).

In an impossible situation, Abraham knew that Isaac would live because that’s what God had promised! And my friends, the Word of the Lord was and still is a record of divine foreshadowing and in His promises, God continues to point us ahead...and that’s the gift that God has given us in our Baptism. In Romans 6 Paul writes, “Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his” (Romans 6:3-5).

In these Baptismal words of divine foreshadowing, God has revealed your future. And today, He has made you a promise, and against this promise of God, even the gates of hell cannot prevail. God will provide. And God will keep His promises. And by the gift of faith, God will continue to give us the power to do the impossible things to which He has called us in Christ Jesus our Lord. Believe and rejoice in God’s promise to you this day.

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