



Pentecost 4-June 28, 2020
Baltic and East Nidaros Lutheran Parish
Genesis 22:1-14 and Matthew 10:40-42

“Hearing the Call”

- Sermon by Pastor Randall J. Questad

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

I had a really tough English teacher in Junior High. He demanded perfection from his students when answering questions on his literature and grammar exams. Having an answer that was close to what he wanted didn't count. I can still see and still have some nightmares about taking his literature exams. The exams always looked the same. The first part of the exam tested your memory of who wrote the literature pieces being tested. Sometimes he would list the author of the story and you had to recall the title of the story and you had to write out the title exactly as it was in the literature book or he gave you the title of the story and you had to give the author's name and of course spell it correctly. The next part of the exams was to test your knowledge of the main characters of the stories we read. This often was the hardest part of the exam because you were never told which characters were going to be on the test. It was up to you to know what story they were from and if they were a character that was worthy of remembering. The final section of his exams were a few essay questions on the main themes of these stories that we were supposed to have read.

In the gospel for today, it can be a little tricky knowing who the main characters are in this short 3 verse gospel for today. No specific names are given. Prophets and righteous persons are mentioned, but no specific names are given. The following pronouns whoever, you, me, and I are used, but who do these pronouns refer to? Who are the main characters in this “short” story of three verses and what does all of this business about welcoming mean? And what is the reward that these unknown characters are giving out if they are welcomed by others?

*If unlocking the doors to heaven depended on us getting a passing score of knowing who the main characters are from the information given from these three verses and if it depended on you and me answering an essay question about what the themes of **welcoming** and **rewards** refer to from this short story, St. Peter would probably turn most of us away. Fortunately, I don't expect to see my Junior High English teacher guarding the gates of heaven with an exam on these three verses. But hidden in these verses are exactly what you need to fling wide the gates of eternity.*

This salvation comes to you in the same way it came to Abraham and Isaac in the first lesson for today. Abraham and Isaac are certainly important characters in this familiar and frightening story from Genesis. From this story, Abraham often is given the title of “Father of Faith”. Abraham and Isaac are active characters in this narrative. They are saddling donkeys, cutting wood, bringing two more men along to assist on this mission, they are traveling for three days before arriving at their destination, Isaac is carrying the wood for the burnt offering, old Abraham somehow binds up young Isaac and lays him on the wood, reaches out his knife to do you know what. Abraham indeed demonstrates in all that he did. When this narrative begins and just as Abraham was raising his knife, God called out Abraham's name and Abraham responded each time by saying, “Here I Am”.

Many times, Abraham is remembered as the most important character of this story. But Abraham would never have done anything without first having been given faith. And faith begins after hearing the call. Abraham did not take his son Isaac that he had waited so long to be born and decided to end his life because he came up with the idea within himself. As Abraham was laying his son on the altar to be sacrificed, he did not start singing "Great is MY faithfulness."

Throughout Abraham's life, God had spoken to Abraham and whenever he spoke to him, he did for him just as he promised. It was God who had always been faithful to him and not the other way around. Abraham's song was "Great is THY Faithfulness". Abraham knew that when God gave this inconceivable command to sacrifice his son Isaac, God had already promised Abraham would become the father of many nations. God had never let him down in the past and God's unfailing word gave Abraham the faith to walk out in faith again. Faith does not begin within yourself but comes to you just as it did for Abraham and Isaac. It arrives by hearing God call to you.

In the gospel for today, once again, you might think you are the main character. You must be a welcoming person if you are to be a faithful person. A better translation for the word welcome really is to receive. Whoever receives you receives me. The "you" in these verses is each of you. And the "me" is Jesus. Jesus is telling his disciples as he sends them out, if they are received or welcomed, they are also receiving or welcoming Jesus. And what Jesus gives to his disciples as a reward to others as they are welcomed is none other than his word. This is the same word that was given to Abraham. God's word that establishes faith when it is heard and will do inconceivable things because it is God who is the main actor.

You have welcomed Jesus today. You have received Jesus today, because Jesus has spoken to you. I can almost hear each of you responding as Abraham did every time the Lord spoke to him, "Here I Am, Lord send me." Amen.