

## Order of Worship for February 18, 2024

### Prelude

P: The Lord be with you.

**C: And also with you.**

### Opening Hymn: “A Mighty Fortress” – Hymn #657

Confession and Forgiveness p. 203

### Service of the Word

#### Entrance Psalm: ( from Psalm 91)

P: Because you have made the LORD your dwelling place—

**C: the Most High, who is my refuge—**

P: no evil shall be allowed to befall you,

**C: no plague come near your tent.**

P: For He will command His angels concerning you

**C: to guard you in all your ways.**

P: On their hands they will bear you up,

**C: lest you strike your foot against a stone.**

P: You will tread on the lion and the adder;

**C: the young lion and the serpent you will trample underfoot.**

P: “Because he holds fast to Me in love, I will deliver him;

**C: I will protect him, because he knows My name.**

P: When he calls to Me, I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble;

**C: I will rescue him and honor him.**

P: With long life I will satisfy him

**C: and show him My Salvation.**

**ALL: Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit; as it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.**

### Kyrie: (*Lord Have Mercy*) p. 204

### Salutation:

P: The Lord be with you,

**C: and also with you.**

### Prayer of the Day:

P: Let us pray... O Lord, You led Your ancient people through the wilderness and brought them to the promised land. Guide the people of Your Church that following our Savior we may walk through the wilderness of this world toward the glory of the world to come; through Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

**C: Amen.**

**Old Testament Reading: Genesis 22:1-18**

R: After these things God tested Abraham and said to him, "Abraham!" And he said, "Here I am." God 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 of which I shall tell you." So Abraham rose early in the morning, saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him, and his son Isaac. And he cut the wood for the burnt offering and arose and went to the place of which God had told him. On the third day Abraham lifted up his eyes and saw the place from afar. Then Abraham said to his young men, "Stay here with the donkey; I and the boy will go over there and worship and come again to you." And Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering and laid it on Isaac his son. And he took in his hand the fire and the knife. So they went both of them together. And Isaac said to his father Abraham, "My father!" And he said, "Here I am, my son." He said, "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." So they went both of them together. When they came to the place of which God had told him, Abraham built the altar there and laid the wood in order and bound Isaac his son and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. Then Abraham reached out his hand and took the knife to slaughter his son. But the angel of the LORD called to him from heaven and said, "Abraham, Abraham!" And he said, "Here I am." He said, "Do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him, for now I know that you fear God, seeing you have not withheld your son, your only son, from Me." And Abraham lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, behind him was a ram, caught in a thicket by his horns. And Abraham went and took the ram and offered it up as a burnt offering instead of his son. So Abraham called the name of that place, "The LORD will provide"; as it is said to this day, "On the mount of the LORD it shall be provided." And the angel of the LORD called to Abraham a second time from heaven and said, "By Myself I have sworn, declares the LORD, because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, I will surely bless you, and I will surely multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore. And your offspring shall possess the gate of his enemies, and in your offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed, because you have obeyed My voice."

R: This is the Word of the Lord.

**C: Thanks be to God.**

**Hymn of Praise: "The Lamb" – Hymn 547****Epistle Reading: James 1:12-18**

R: Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him. Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am being tempted by God," for God cannot be tempted with evil, and He Himself tempts no one. But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death. Do not be deceived, my beloved brothers. Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or

shadow due to change. Of His own will He brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.

R: This is the Word of the Lord.

**C: Thanks be to God.**

**Holy Gospel: Mark 1:9-15**

P: The Holy Gospel according to St. Mark, the first chapter.

**C: Glory to You, O Lord**

P: In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. And when He came up out of the water, immediately He saw the heavens being torn open and the Spirit descending on Him like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, "You are My beloved Son; with You I am well pleased." The Spirit immediately drove Jesus out into the wilderness. And He was in the wilderness forty days, being tempted by Satan. And He was with the wild animals, and the angels were ministering to Him. Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the gospel of God, and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel."

P: This is the Gospel of the Lord.

**C: Praise to You, O Christ.**

**6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> Petitions of the Lord's Prayer:**

**Sermon Hymn:** "*All Depends on Our Possessing*" - **Hymn #732**

**Sermon:** "*The Hardest Test*" - **Genesis 22:1-18**

One of the most divisive television shows last year was the adaptation of the video game *The Last of Us*. Airing on HBO, it follows a man, Joel, paid to smuggle a girl, Ellie, across a zombie-filled United States, a girl who might hold the key to curing the zombie-causing fungal infections. Both the video game and the TV show have a divisive ending. Having finally reached their goal, Joel finds out that in order to extract the cure from Ellie, she has to die. And instead of letting that happen, he rescues her. The world loses a chance to potentially end the zombie apocalypse, but the father figure saves the girl he's come to think of as a daughter.

According to the creator, Neil Druckmann, when the video game was in development and the ending was placed before focus groups, they were split 50/50 in terms of if Joel, the protagonist, did the right thing, rescuing this girl who he's come to think of as his daughter at the possible cost of saving the world from the fungal zombie plague. But when the focus group was made up of only parents, they were 100% in favor of Joel's actions. As parents, they knew they would do whatever they needed to do to protect their child, even at the cost of something that could be seen as the greater good.

That's part of what makes today's Old Testament lesson so controversial, as well. Parents will do almost anything to protect their children, and here we have a story where a father is asked to sacrifice his son. Why would God test Abraham by asking him to sacrifice his only son? Why would a God who condemns the child sacrifice of Israel's neighbors command one of his most

faithful servants to do such a thing? Rabbis and theologians and philosophers have spilled a lot of ink arguing over what this story means, whether Abraham was right to bind Isaac, if God was right to ask Abraham to do this, and if everyone involved knew events were going to happen the way they ended up happening. It's the hardest test imaginable.

To help us think about this, let's look about ten chapters back, in Genesis 12, when Abraham is called by God to go to a land he's never seen. We're also told Abraham and his wife are old and childless. Yet God chooses them and promises to make a great nation through them. Throughout the next ten chapters and approximately thirty years, God keeps going to Abraham and reminding him of that promise. God, who likes to make something out of nothing, is going to make a great nation out of an old, childless couple to show that it happened only because of God, because it couldn't have happened otherwise.

And so Isaac, when he's finally born, has a great deal of expectation placed upon him. He's the chosen son. He's the one through whom God will fulfill his promise. Finally, Abraham won't have to depend on his nephew or another relative to be his heir. God's fulfilled his promise, and Abraham's genes and legacy will live on.

With all of those expectations, it would have been easy for Abraham to have begun to make Isaac into an idol. If Isaac wasn't just the fulfillment of God's promises, but was instead the one who was going to make the promises come true himself, Abraham's focus had shifted away from God.

And so, God tested Abraham and told him to take Isaac to a mountain and offer him up to God. Abraham followed what God had commanded, until the angel said, "Do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him, for now I know that you fear God, seeing you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me." Abraham had passed the hardest test, had shown that God was who he trusted above all else.

When the early Christians were trying to understand how God was at work in this story, this is how they explained it. "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." He considered that God was able even to raise him from the dead, from which, figuratively speaking, he did receive him back" (Hebrews 11:17-19).

Abraham trusted that God would fulfill his promise somehow, even if he didn't understand how. If God had promised to bless the world through Isaac, then God would make that happen, even if it required bringing him back from the dead. Abraham trusted in God, and God passed that test. He provided a substitute sacrifice to save Isaac.

Abraham, too, passed the test. The test was not a temptation to do evil or to trap him. Instead, it was meant to strengthen Abraham and to build him up. The test shows that Abraham will love, fear, obey, worship, and serve God. The testing shows God who Abraham is, shows Abraham who God is, and Abraham who he is himself.

The place that God provided a substitute sacrifice would continue to be the place where that happened. Later in the Old Testament, we're told that King David offers a sacrifice here to stop

a plague. After that, we're told that is where Solomon places the altar for the temple, a place where sacrifices would be offered up in the place of those whose sins demand punishment.

More than that, we see ourselves in the story. Just as we deserve to die for our sins, God provides a substitute for us. Jesus is the sacrifice we could never offer but need more than anything. We would not give ourselves to God, so he gave himself to us. He died so that we might live. By his sacrifice, we are forgiven, and love is shown to God.

Not only did God know the pain he put Abraham through, he knows the pain Isaac went through, as well. When we use this story of the almost sacrifice of Isaac as a parallel to Jesus, we can sometimes make both stories sound like some sort of divine child abuse. But when we remember that God is Triune, and that God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit are all God, then we know that God wasn't an abusive father killing his one and only son. God gave Himself for us. Jesus passed the hardest test by remaining sinless throughout his time on earth, and remained obedient to His Father's will. Jesus, the Son of God, takes upon himself the sin of the whole world on the cross. God is instead loving, doing what needed to be done to save us all. Understanding that, what God has done for what our sins deserve, is what this season of Lent is all about.

It's the hardest test we will have to face, trusting in God in the face of circumstances that make us doubt God. God calls us to sacrifice anything that keeps us from him. More than that, God gives us more than we could ever imagine to replace what we give up. Those who give up their families to follow Jesus get a new church family. Those who give up their earthly treasures gain treasures in heaven. Those who lose their lives will find it. Those who are ridiculed on earth will be called blessed. All because Jesus passed the hardest test for us.

### **Prayer of the Church**

P: Lord in Your mercy,

**C: hear our prayer.**

### **Sharing Our Ministry:**

### **Offering and Voluntary:**

## **Service of the Sacrament p. 208**

### **Preface: p. 208**

P: It is truly good, right, and proper that we should in all times and in all places give thanks to You, almighty God, heavenly Father for You sent Your Son Christ Jesus into this world to face the devil and temptation in our place and to not give in as we do, therefore with angels and all the army of heaven we praise and make great Your holy name, evermore praising You and singing . . .

### **Sanctus: (*Holy, Holy, Holy*) p. 208**

**Prayer of Thanksgiving:**

P: We give thanks to You Lord God for have defeated evil by the life, death, and resurrection of Your Son, Christ Jesus who faced down the devil armed simply with the power of Your Word. Send Your Holy Spirit so that we come to Jesus; supper trusting that He give us His true body and blood to forgive us from h ow we fall into temptation. As He taught us we pray . . .

**Lord's Prayer, The Words of Our Lord, and Pax Domini:** (*Peace of the Lord*) p. 209

**Agnus Dei:** (*Lamb of God*) p. 210

**Distribution of Holy Communion:**

“*Jesus, Priceless Treasure*” – **Hymn #743**

“*The God of Abraham Praise*” – **Hymn #798**

**Nunc Dimittis:** (*Now let us depart*) p. 211

**Prayer after Communion:**

P: Lord God, our strength, the battle of good and evil rages within and around us, and our ancient foe tempts us with his deceits and empty promises. Keep us steadfast in Your Word and, when we fall, raise us again and restore us through Your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

**C: Amen.**



**Benedicamus and Benediction:** p. 212

**Closing Hymn:** “*Jesus, Grant That Balm and Healing*” - **Hymn #421**

**Postlude**