

Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church (Columbus, OH)
Lent Midweek 5 – April 6, 2022
Genesis 22:1-14 – God Provides His Sons Redemption
By Vicar Peter Wagner

In the name of Jesus. Amen. Our text is Old Testament reading for the fifth Sunday in Lent, from Genesis chapter 22, when God told Abraham to offer his only son Isaac as a sacrifice.

This Lent, we've heard what it means to live as sons of dust. As sons of Adam, we're condemned to toil with him in the dust. Being a son of dust means a life of futility, struggle, and death. Yet being a son of dust also means sharing Adam's hope of redemption. It means looking to Jesus, the promised champion from our own race. It means trusting him to crush Satan's head in the dust. Like the patriarch Jacob, being a son of dust means holding God to his promised redemption, even wrestling him when he seems to fight against us. Like the Israelites, being a son of dust means trusting God's redemption, that he has already brought us out of our enemy's kingdom with his strong hand. And our champion is with us here in the wilderness. He who brought us out of Egypt will not abandon us. He faithfully nourishes us, however we wander in this life.

Living as the sons of dust also means suffering pain and loss. We just read how God told Abraham to sacrifice his only son Isaac. We all dread that something might happen to our loved ones, especially to our children. We know how fragile life is. It's frightening to love someone, because in this world, people always suffer the consequences of sin: pain, death, and separation. But you should not be afraid of relationships, because God was not afraid to love us. When you dread what might happen to your loved ones, take comfort that God himself suffered pain and loss for us. He gave his own beloved Son to redeem us, to bring us back to himself, to be our resurrection hope.

Abraham was a son of dust like us. He admitted it himself. When he pleaded with God to save his nephew Lot from Sodom, he said, **“Behold, I have undertaken to speak to the Lord, I who am but dust and ashes.”**¹ And God accepted Abraham's prayer. He even promised to make Abraham's offspring as numerous as the dust of the earth. He said, **“if one can count the dust of the earth, your offspring also can be counted.”**²

Hebrews chapter 11 vividly describes Abraham's unwavering hope in that promise. It says, **“By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place that he was to receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. By faith he went to live in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, living in tents with Isaac and Jacob, heirs with him of the same promise. For he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God. By faith Sarah herself received power to conceive, even when she was past the age, since she considered him faithful who had promised. Therefore from one man, and him as good as dead, were born descendants as many as the stars of heaven and as many as the innumerable grains of sand by the seashore.”**³

But in Genesis 22, the son of dust who was promised uncountable descendants could easily count his offspring. Two. Ishmael and Isaac. And Ishmael was not the son of promise. He was a son of mistrust and unfaithfulness. God said to Abraham, **“through Isaac shall your offspring be named.”**⁴ So really, Abraham's count was one. One grain of sand. Hardly a vast ocean beach. And now the count was about to be zero. For God told Abraham, **“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.”**

That's too much for any father to bear. The sons of dust know suffering all too well. But to kill your son, your only son whom you love? A father would rather die. A father's son is the one to carry on his name when he's gone. His son is his hope of immortality, his hope for a life better than his own. Even worse, Abraham knew

¹ Genesis 18:27

² Genesis 13:16

³ Hebrews 11:8-12

⁴ Genesis 21:12

that the promised Messiah would come through Isaac. Killing Isaac meant cutting off all hope of redemption for mankind. Truly the end of all hope.

But Abraham's hope never wavered. He was certain that God's promise would come true, even if Isaac died. So the New Testament explains that Abraham offered his son in faith, trusting that God could even raise Isaac from the dead. Hebrews 11 continues, **"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 – here's the point – He considered that God was able even to raise him from the dead, from which, figuratively speaking, he did receive him back."**⁵ When Abraham told his young men, **"I and the boy will go over there and worship and come again to you,"** he meant that he and Isaac would both come back alive.

When Isaac asked his father where the lamb was for the burnt offering, Abraham assured him, **"God will provide for himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son."** By this, Abraham confessed his unwavering hope in Jesus, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

God's sons should have been more numerous than the dust of the earth. He who formed Adam from the dust should have had all Adam's children for his own. But we all went astray. Our heavenly Father felt the pain we feel when our children go astray and rebel. Christ alone was faithful to his Father. He alone of all creation was obedient. And his obedience was self-sacrificing love, obedience unto death. So like Abraham, the count of God's sons was down to one. And then God truly gave up his Son, so that his count was truly zero. As we confess in the Creed, **"For us men and for our salvation, he came down from heaven and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the virgin Mary, and was made man, and was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate. He suffered and was buried."**

Our great comfort is that God suffered with us. The Father endured all the suffering and pain and loss that we dread. The Son of God became a son of dust to share our pain. They mocked him. They spit on him. They struck him and crucified him. Jesus offered himself on Golgotha in our place, just as the ram was offered in Isaac's place. Jesus died for Abraham, for Isaac, and for you.

But our Easter hope of redemption is the same as Abraham's. Abraham knew God would raise his son from the dead, and we know our Redeemer did not decay to dust in the grave. He overcame death. He descended into hell to proclaim victory over all sin and death, to crush Satan's head. And just as Abraham received Isaac back from the dead by God's miraculous intervention, the Father received his Son back at Easter. And because he is risen from the dead, he lives and reigns to bring us all back to the Father.

He who did not spare his only begotten Son, his only Son whom he loved, but who gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?⁶ How will he not keep his promise to raise you and all who die in Jesus? God's promises cannot fail. The God who was faithful to Abraham is faithful to you.

God brought the sons of Israel into the promised land and established his dwelling with them, so that Solomon prayed at the dedication of the temple, **"Blessed be the Lord who has given rest to his people Israel, according to all that he promised. Not one word has failed of all his good promise, which he spoke by Moses his servant."**⁷ Paul wrote confidently in 2 Corinthians, **"All the promises of God find their Yes in Jesus."**⁸ God's promises are sure, and they apply to you. The Apostle Peter said in Acts 2, **"The promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off."**⁹ Your Redeemer has promised to wipe every tear from your eyes. He will comfort you and restore your loved ones. Nothing in all creation will ever separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.¹⁰

Therefore, O sons of dust, we do not grieve as those who have no hope. Hear God's certain promise of resurrection. Hear it, believe it, and put your hope in it. Isaiah 26:19, **"Your dead shall live; their bodies shall rise. You who dwell in the dust, awake and sing for joy!"** Amen.

⁵ Hebrews 11:17-19

⁶ Romans 8:32

⁷ 1 Kings 8:56

⁸ 2 Corinthians 1:19-20

⁹ Acts 2:39

¹⁰ Romans 8:38-39