

Sunday 2nd July 2023

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God is love, let us adore God by sharing God's love.

God is ever present, around us and within us, we worship together in God.

Reading Genesis 22:1-14

Reflection

Everything changes – but what makes change happen?

Discoveries, inventions, new ideas and sometimes rebellion. This is a story about rebellion.

Abraham and Sarah had waited a long time for a child and he had changed their lives. God had promised Abraham that he would be the father of a great people and his descendants would be as many as the grains of sand in the desert but without a child he could not imagine how this would happen. He and Sarah were old and it all felt too late but with God and faith it is never too late. When Sarah heard she was to have a baby in her old age she laughed and that inspired their son's name – Isaac means laughter. However there does not seem much laughter in this chapter of their story and to us reading this as Christians we are appalled that this sort of thing could happen, but it did.

In the time when Abraham and Sarah lived it was commonplace for sons to be sacrificed because the people believed that God needed a sacrifice to satisfy his disappointment with the people's behaviour. Abraham was simply following the tradition but then there is a twist in the tale and instead of sacrificing his son Abraham sacrifices a sheep which he sees caught in the bushes. This is the rebellion, not in the story as it happened but in the story as it was written.

Most of what we read in the Bible was written long after the events that are being described. The stories of Jesus were not written until 50 – 70 years after his death, and most of the Old Testament stories were written hundreds of years after the events they describe. They are based on stories passed down orally, stories told around campfires and through families – the 'do you remember when' stories. The stories that were written are about explanation of how the people got to where they were.

By the time this story was written the people no longer believed God required human sacrifice, although animals were still sacrificed so what had happened to change their view, to change what they believed? It took someone of real courage to stand against the crowd and do it differently. Of course the story still places God at the centre of this rebellion with the angel of God inspiring/instructing Abraham's actions but this is the story that starts the change.

Many generations later the people of God would be inspired to understand that God did not require animal sacrifice either (see Micah). In fact, God does not need anything from us other than a desire to be loving in our words and actions, and to have a passion for justice. Another radical change, and then Jesus took things further challenging the religious understanding and practices of his day and revealing fully the personal nature of a relationship with God.

Everything changes. Scientists are constantly discovering new things about creation that question some of the understandings of the past. We have names for things – light, gravity, magnetism but although we can name them we still do not truly understand how these things work and discoveries in quantum science challenge some of the bedrock theories of the past such as the Theory of Relativity. Unless we are open to change then evolution cannot happen. Unless we are willing to question then we will not grow in our understanding.

Questioning wide spread beliefs about God can be dangerous, as Jesus found out, but if we do not question then belief in God becomes less and less plausible for every generation. We use the term God but there are multiple understandings of what is meant by that word. Some people hold on to the God who sits out there watching and pointing the finger, an image many grew up with. Some people choose to read the bible and take it literally and build a picture of a God of anger and vengeance.

For many Christians today the 'power' of God is in the eternal presence within creation, God is, God is everywhere and in everything, in the joys and the sorrows of all of life, God is the source of all being and

could need nothing from us. God is not angry and vengeful, we are humans are that and we imagine God to be like us forgetting that humanity is made in the image of God not God made in the image of humanity. In our questioning we seek to find out more about God by discovering more about what it means to be fully human, in the way we believe Jesus was fully human.

To follow the way of Jesus is an adventure into the unknown. It is a journey of questioning and challenging the status quo of ideas and exploring new ways of understanding. It is never too late to learn something new, never too late to explore a new way, never too late to love as Jesus loved. We are called to be rebels.