

After these things, God tested Abraham.

After what things? Well, after God called Abraham to leave behind his father and land and his whole world and wander off to a new land that God would show him. Already that was a test. Abraham passed.

And after God had promised a son, and Abraham grew old, and Sarai his wife grew old. After Abraham was ready to settle for his son through the slave woman Hagar, and God said no, wait a little longer. Another test.

After Isaac had been born, and grown, and love for Isaac was etched into the very being of Abraham. After these things God spoke to 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 that I shall show you.

Let me see if you love me, says God. Take what you live for, what you would die for, burn it up for me. Not a car or a house or honors or a job, but a living breathing son, part of yourself, kill him, burn his body.

I'll know you love me then.

So Abraham rose early in the morning, saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him and his son Isaac; he cut the wood for the burnt offering, and set out and went to the place in the distance that God had shown him.

On the third day he saw the place far away.

Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering and laid it on his son Isaac, and he himself carried the fire and the knife. So the two of them walked on together.

What did father say to son in those last moments together? There are no words for such a moment except Isaac's question. "The fire and the wood are here, but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?"

If Isaac knew, would he hate his father? If he knew that the love of his father for him was nothing next to the obedience of his father to God, would he think his father deranged?

God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering. Abraham answered. Abraham's little lamb. His beloved lamb, his only lamb.

They came to the place, Abraham built an altar, arranged the wood, bound his son Isaac, and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood.

Abraham reached out his hand and took the knife to kill his son.

God stopped him then, the test was over. "I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son from me."

Does it sound preposterous that a man would do this to his own flesh and blood? Child sacrifice was common in the ancient middle east. And fathers have trained sons for war to receive them home in a box. And that we might have the freedom to drink alcohol, as much as we might like, we sacrifice our sons and daughters on our highways and in our homes. And how many are our children whose hearts are singed by the dreams of mom and dad.

But that God would ask Abraham to do this hideous test, I want to turn away from God as I hear it, until I remember.

Another time, another test.

Now you and I are the testers, God the tested.

Continually we ask, Do you really love me God? Show me. And once and for all time, God does.

The Father takes his son . his only son, whom he loves. He sends him on a long journey to a place called Jerusalem. And on the way the son knows. He will be the lamb which God will provide for the offering.

The Son asks if there might not be some other way, but knowing us, the Father says no.

On the way to the place the son carries the wood of the sacrifice until he can bear it no more.

In the person of soldiers, the Father drives the nails into his own son, and as he is dying the Son cries out in anguish, My God, my God why have you forsaken me.

All because we need to test the love of God.

God's word and all God does for us are not enough. We need proof.

That proof is Jesus being sacrificed. ~~Placing~~ ^{Taking} Isaac's place. God taking Abraham's place. We demanding the test.

When the test was over, the lamb sacrificed, this is what Paul could write: If God is for us who is against us? He who did not withhold his own Son, but gave him up for all of us, will he not with him also give us everything else?

Or in another place Paul says, But God proves his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

God passes the test. God plunges the knife into the heart of God's Son ^{for you} So that ^{you} ~~we~~ can be sure that neither life nor death, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation shall be able to separate ^{you} ~~us~~ from the Love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Thanks be to God.