

## **Bible Study 24<sup>th</sup> June 2020**

### **Preparation**

In our Bible Study this week we will be reading the following lectionary readings set for Sunday (28<sup>th</sup> June):

- **Genesis 22:1-14**
- **Psalm 13**
- **Romans 6:12-23**
- **Matthew 10:40-42**

There's a short YouTube introduction at [\[link\]](#) and a few reflections on page 2 (if you want to read these, please look after you've looked at the reading(s) yourself).

When exploring this week's readings you may wish to follow the pattern below:

**Pray** a simple prayer first. Perhaps start with a line from Psalm 13 (eg verse 3: **Consider and answer me**, O LORD my God! Give light to my eyes, or I will sleep the sleep of death.)

**Then** read one of the readings

**PAUSE** and reflect on that reading

- Was some new light shed on the passage for you?
- Is there something you would like to ask God to "consider and answer" as a result of the reading?

If anything particular has struck you, try returning to it and reflecting again on that part of the reading. You might also want to make some notes.

After your reflection, you may wish to move on to another reading. (You don't have to look at them all.)

When you have finished your reflections, pray the final prayer:

### **Final Prayer:**

Steadfast love of God, consider us and answer our deepest questions. So may our faith become an answer to the questions which others ask. **Amen.**

## ***A few reflections***

Sometimes there is something in a reading that challenges us more than usual – and we are left asking, “Why would God ever do such a thing?” and “Is that really what God did or wants?” This reading about Abraham being asked to go up the mountain and sacrifice his only son is that sort of reading for me. This is completely contrary to the promise that God has earlier made to Abraham (which appears in the last week’s reading) that Isaac was to be the first of many, many generations to come from Abraham and Sarah. So is God suddenly confused? Has God developed a terrible and cruel sense of humour? Poor Isaac must have been deeply traumatised by the experience. What kind of God would wish for that? Could there be another explanation?

Like last week’s reading about Hagar, it helps me to look at the context of this situation. We are, in a sense, there at the very earliest days of humanity’s relationship with the One God. Abraham has received the promise that he will become father of a nation (actually two nations if you include Hagar’s child, Ishmael). But maybe Abraham doesn’t really know God too well. Living at a time when child sacrifice happened (sacrifices to appease the gods if there was a bad harvest, for example) Abraham lived in a very different, harsh, prehistoric world, where stories were recounted from generation to generation by word of mouth.

Perhaps Abraham is reaching out blindly to God – what shall I do to show I follow you and worship and do your will? Is it really God’s voice that says, “Go and sacrifice your son”, or is it an inner voice nagging at Abraham – “Look at the pagan people around you and see how much they are willing to sacrifice to appease their gods, are you willing to do that for the One God?”

Then there’s the test. Not that God wants Abraham to sacrifice his son, but how strong is his faith? Maybe the test was set up more by Abraham and his ancestors in the telling of the story? Whatever the case, the nature of God is steadfast love (Psalm 13:5) and that love does not command us to kill our children. Indeed several generations after this, Moses receives the command, “Thou shalt not kill”. Thus the story ends with an angel intervening and acknowledging that Abraham is indeed willing to offer everything he loves to God, but reminding him that God will provide for his needs, there’s no need to sacrifice a child. Abraham might have been confused about God, but God’s loving nature was the same then, today, and forever.

The Matthew reading is a continuation of the sending out of the disciples, which has several parts (and we’ve already looked at). The sending out ends with the much gentler reflection, that any good deed or kindness has great value. Even a cup of water is enough to show your heart is worthy of reward. It is not necessary to sacrifice your son! And our Romans reading reminds us that it was Jesus, God’s son, who was indeed sacrificed by the authorities (not by God!) and thus revealed to everyone that the steadfast love in God’s grace surpasses all that might lead in our lives to sin and death.