



In the Old Testament reading from Genesis last week we heard how Abraham was distressed when he had to send his son Ishmael, his son to his servant wife, away from the family home as Sarah his other wife did not want the two sons growing up together. God told Abraham that he would take care of Ishmael so trusting in God he let them go – a clear example of Abraham showing trust in God – but there was a more testing time to come.

In today Genesis reading we hear how God pushed Abraham to a far greater test. This time he was to be told to offer his other son Isaac, for whom much was expected of, as a burnt sacrifice to God. God was testing Abraham to see just how far he would go in obeying and trusting in him. Abraham clearly was going to go through with the instructions, as Isaac was bound and on the makeshift altar with the fire set and a knife in his hand, but, God was happy that Abraham had complete trust in him so spared Isaac and a ram was offered for sacrifice in his place.

There are times in our lives when we have all felt tested in one way or another and no more so than over these past 3 months. In our daily lives we have had to adapt to so many new situations and often without the normal network of family, friends and colleagues to help us get through the day. We have had our faith tested in some of the heart wrenching stories we have heard, in people's losses of loved ones and in the many difficult situations people have found themselves in. We have had our commitment tested as we have been unable to worship in the traditional way that has been part of our lives for so long.

In our reading we are given confidence that though God does test us at certain times in our lives, by staying strong in our faith and our trust in God, God will be there to bring us through those difficult times. New ways have been found to work our way through the difficult situations, we have found strength and support in people, many we previously didn't know, and we have found that sometimes when we have to let go of the things we thought were so important to us we can have a clearer vision to see new possibilities.

Collect for the day

Almighty God, you have broken the tyranny of sin and have sent the Spirit of your Son into our hearts whereby we call you Father; give us grace to dedicate our freedom to your service, that we and all creation may be brought to the glorious liberty of the children of God; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen

A reading from the book of Genesis

After these things God tested Abraham. He said to him, "Abraham!" And he said, "Here I am." ² He 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 that I shall show you." ³ 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.

⁴ On the third day Abraham looked up and saw the place far away. ⁵ Then Abraham said to his young men, "Stay here with the donkey; the boy and I will go over there; we will worship, and then we will come back to you." ⁶ 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. ⁷ Isaac said to his father Abraham, "Father!" And he said, "Here I am, my son." He said, "The fire and the wood are here, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?" ⁸ Abraham said, "God himself will provide the lamb for a burnt offering, my son.", so the two of them walked on together.

⁹ When they came to the place that God had shown him, Abraham built an altar there and laid the wood in order. He bound his son Isaac, and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. ¹⁰ Then Abraham reached out his hand and took the knife to kill his son. ¹¹ But the angel of the LORD called to him from heaven, and said, "Abraham, Abraham!" And he said, "Here I am." ¹² He said, "Do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him; for now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me." ¹³ And Abraham looked up and saw a ram, caught in a thicket by its horns. Abraham went and took the ram and offered it up as a burnt offering instead of his son. ¹⁴ So Abraham called that place "The LORD will provide"; as it is said to this day, "On the mount of the LORD it shall be provided"



*Over the next few weeks we will be including a Psalm in our worship. We so rarely use the Psalms as part of our Sunday service, yet, across the 150 of them they have so much to offer us.
Today's reading is taken from Psalm 89*

Your love, O Lord, for ever will I sing;
From age to age my mouth will proclaim your faithfulness.
For I am persuaded that your love is established forever;
And you have set your faithfulness in the heavens.
You rule the raging of the sea
And still the surging of its waves.
You have a mighty arm:
Strong is your hand and high is your right hand.
Righteousness and justice are the foundations of your throne;
Love and truth go before your face.
Happy are the people who know the festal shout!
They walk, O Lord, in the light of your presence.
They rejoice daily in your name;
They are jubilant in your righteousness.
For you are the glory of their strength
And by your favour our might is exalted.
Truly the Lord is our ruler;
The Holy One of Israel is our king.

A reading from the Gospel according to Matthew

⁴⁰ "Whoever welcomes you welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me. ⁴¹ Whoever welcomes a prophet in the name of a prophet will receive a prophet's reward; and whoever welcomes a righteous person in the name of a righteous person will receive the reward of the righteous; ⁴² and whoever gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones in the name of a disciple—truly I tell you, none of these will lose their reward."



Words from Fr Rodney

As Christians we are called to be and do many things that reflect the life and teaching of Jesus. I'm sure that in our travels in life we have all encountered places where we have felt anything other than welcome. Jesus calls us to be and do many things to bring others to be disciples with us, but so often the key lies in the first meeting. Making people welcome when they appear at our churches is I hope something we try to do, it isn't always easy for us, or for them, but I think it is a ministry that we do fairly well. In our Gospel for today Jesus underlines the importance of the ministry of welcome that can either open or close the way of faith for people who appear at our churches. This week the government suddenly announced that places of worship could, but not must, re-open for worship from the 4th July. But re-opening is surrounded with a plethora of guidelines and health and safety regulations both for our buildings and for the way worship will now have to take place. It is certainly going to make our return very different and very strange. At this point neither of our churches will be opening on 4th July as so much planning and preparation is necessary to comply with the new regulations. But not least because I, together with many of you, are required to remain 'shielding' until the 1st August. Please pray for the churchwardens and others as they struggle to ensure that our churches will be as safe as possible when we do return. But pray also that despite the new regulations our churches will remain the welcoming places Jesus calls us to be.

Let us pray

Father in heaven as we come together with our brothers and sisters in faith far and wide, we bring before you our thanks for the gifts of the past week and our hopes and concerns for the week ahead. We pray especially for all those churches attempting to respond to the recent changes introduced by the government and give thanks that some churches are tentatively opening their doors for the first time in many weeks. Although we look forward to the day when we can gather together in person, we continue to thank you for the opportunity modern technology has given us to worship together for so long during this period and for the talents of all those who have made this possible. Amen

Father of all, whose love and support is offered to all unconditionally, we bring before you all those areas of the world where there is hatred, violence, and despair, especially those communities divided by prejudice and fear. We ask particularly that those in authority act responsibly, with empathy and compassion and that healing rather than division becomes the focus of their actions. We also think of all those countries battling the virus without the resources they need and pray that the world finds the will to share resources and expertise fairly. Amen

Father of kindness and love, we bring before you are families, friends and neighbours. We thank you for all the love and support we have received from those around us this past week. We continue to pray for the safety of all those moving forward in the current situation; children and all those who work in our schools, local hospitals as well as doctors, dentists and other health professionals who are doing difficult jobs at this time;

We also ask for your blessings on those who quietly go about their daily work, supporting and helping us in our everyday lives. Amen

Father of healing and compassion, we pray today for all those who are sick in body, mind or spirit, especially those we wish to pray for today.... We also pray for all those who are vulnerable and struggling to cope, those with anxiety, those who feel trapped in domestic violence and all those whose treatment has been delayed or compromised during the pandemic.

We continue to pray for those suffering from the virus, their loved ones and those who care for them and ask for blessings on the work of all those working on treatments and vaccines. Amen

Father of hope and eternal life, we remember today all those who have gone before us, those who have died recently, especially in the pandemic, those whose anniversaries are around this time and any we wish to pray for ourselves today... we thank you for their love, friendship and our memories of them and we pray for comfort and strength for their loved ones. Finally, remembering God's gift of eternal life freely given, we ask that they rest in peace and rise in glory, Amen

In a moment of silence bring your own prayers to God

The Lords prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name;
thy kingdom come; thy will be done; on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.

And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us.

And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil.

For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory, for ever and ever.
Amen.

