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**GENESIS 22:1-14 Abraham and His Knife**

Personally, I come to worship to be enriched....to have opportunity to say and sing and pray my thanks to God for this incredible gift of life...and to grow in my experience of God's presence in my spirit, my life....what is often called "spirituality."

So today I am confronted with this horrendous biblical story of Abraham going to sacrifice his son Isaac!

The story comes from a time when child sacrifice happened...even if it is a story against child sacrifice because God did not allow the sacrifice to happen.... this story presents Abraham understanding faithfulness as being willing to sacrifice his son....well, let's do our best with this repulsive story.

--In this story, faith for Abraham is what he trusts....that on which he bases his life.

Trusting God—what does that mean....to "trust God"?

--How can we have trust in a Creator....a Spirit....a reality we cannot adequately express let alone define?

Christians often talk of "trusting God"....we use the phrase in worship....we say that Abraham trusted God.

--What is the experience of "trusting God" like in your lives...in mine?

If part of our purpose is to grow spiritually, each of us needs to be more aware of in what ways trust in God is experienced—and in what ways we do not trust God: what are those experiences in your life and mine?

I am increasingly aware that we preachers need to be not just about declaring what faith is....what we are called to be and do.

--We need to be about giving people the raw data of human experience, calling attention to our experiences in life, to give people the basic building blocks on which they can build their

own declarations.

--In other words, we in the Christian church need to be not about proclaiming conclusions as much as giving people resources so they can draw their own conclusions.

So I speak personally....not because I think my experience should be your experience....but because we need to help one other reflect on trust, on faith, in specific, personal ways.

One way a taste of trusting God is experienced in my life revolves around "one grain of sand" experiences.

Haven't we all heard of a human life being described as but one grain of sand among billions on a beach?

--No matter how important whatever I am doing seems to me, my trust in God is increased if I remember my life as being "one grain of sand"!

When I remember that the universe got along for billions of years without me....and will do long after my human life is completed, it becomes clear to me that there is a reality, a power, far greater than I at the heart of the universe.

--That suggests strongly to me that there are divine purposes that I grasp only partially....and that trusting those divine purposes is both necessary and sensible.

Acknowledging the reality and importance of those divine purposes leads me to seek greater awareness of what those purposes are.

--Trusting God for me thus comes to include that helping others rather than putting others down is at the heart of those purposes....that respect and love trump hatred and destructiveness....and that remaining centered on these and other seemingly divine purposes makes human life more satisfying and rich.

It makes sense to me that trusting that divine reality, that higher power, those divine purposes, above whatever plans and work I may have, is essential at the heart of life.

--Without such "one grain of sand" moments, I easily slip into thinking that what I plan and do is of absolute importance....and my frustration rises when I have put my trust in something less than divine reality...namely, I have trusted my obviously important views as being absolute!

Don't get me wrong: the reality we call G-O-D seems to have created life in such a way as to make use of our best efforts...so what we think and do has its place in human life, in the life of this universe.

--Trusting God for me is keeping that in perspective....a perspective in which humility about our own role and efforts is not only appropriate but is essential to life's satisfactions and joys.

Another way in which I experience trust in God revolves around decisions.

--Perhaps you have had the experience of things turning out well as a result of making certain decisions...yet another time having life go well because events go differently than you decided they should go!

It even happens in preaching: there are Sundays when I think I have something to say that seems to come as insight and wisdom, as if it were a word from God...and then I can tell from reactions and lack of comment that perhaps I wasn't on the same wavelength God really was!

--Then there are Sundays I enter preaching thinking I don't have it all together...that it is not well expressed...then responses make it clear that something in it touched lives.

--Hm-m-m-m....maybe there is something at work here in addition to Jim!!

My sense of trust in God increases when I can be part of decisions that are made faithfully...then we move ahead to the next day or next work to be done...knowing that our decisions will be used and our lives as persons, as a church, will benefit—with the decisions I, we, make not being the sole factor.

--I learn to take seriously the responsibility of decisions I make, we make....but to trust that there is a reality greater than our human decision making ability....and I am at least beginning to trust in God.

I invite you to reflect on ways in which you experience trust in God...I invite you to conversations with one another around our experiences of trust in God....for we do learn from one another's experiences.

Consider this story of Abraham in relation to Jesus in Gethsemane facing arrest and execution.

--Jesus is in a situation where he must choose...to trust God or not to trust God.

--In that situation, Jesus, against all human tendencies, chooses to trust God's promise.

We sometimes want to think that our faith will bring sweetness and light...that we will feel God's love in our lives and become fulfilled and at peace....that God's presence will make everything clear.

We, like Jesus, live not by mere human opinion, but upheld by a higher power....a greater reality.

--We are called to take seriously that we are a tiny speck in the universe...that we exist for the decades and years we are given....that the world got along quite well without us for billions of years....and will do so again after we are gone...and that we are called to trust purposes greater than we have even begun to imagine.

We are called to trust our present and future to God....like, Jesus, to entrust our living and dying to God.

Come to think of it, our struggle to trust God may be even more difficult than this story of Abraham and Isaac!

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