

“ABRAHAM — FATHER OF ISAAC”

Scripture: Genesis 22:1-14

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It was an ordinary day that I remember very well. We lived in Mocksville and we were used to living the city so it was a treat to have cows as our neighbors — across the street, behind us, beside us — and a lot of times at lunchtime I would come home and take baby Phillip for a walk. Phil is a big, 6'2" almost 200 pound boy now, young man, but at that time I could hold him in the crook of my arm. I can still remember — it was an ordinary day; he was maybe two or three months old, but just somehow, just overwhelming in me, that I just really desired that my son has a great life — that he has a joyful life, that he is happy. And then I just sensed that that's the way that God feels about *all* of us regardless of our age or our size, that our Heavenly Father desires for us, out of His great love for us to have the most abundant life possible, the life that He planned for us when He fashioned us and created us.

Today on this Father's Day, this is especially a day to honor our fathers and there is all kinds of advice and good things you can learn other places, but especially in the Church of Jesus Christ, I want you to hear about the makings of a godly father and what does a godly father look like? I wanted to use the example of Abraham. Abraham was given the promise as an old man that he would be the father of not just a child, but of a great nation. Now it took awhile for it to come to pass and so he had some trying times and his faith grew and he became stronger, and the passage I am going to read to you was after this child had come, but then he faced probably the greatest test of his life, on Mt. Moriah.

Genesis, chapter 22, it says:

¹ *Some time later God tested Abraham. He said to him, "Abraham!"
"Here I am," he replied.*

² *Then God said, "Take your son, your only son, Isaac, whom you love, and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains I will tell you about."*

³ *Early the next morning Abraham got up and saddled his donkey. He took with him two of his servants and his son Isaac. When he had cut enough wood for the burnt offering, he set out for the place God had told him about. ⁴ On the third day Abraham looked up and saw the place in the distance. ⁵ He said to his servants, "Stay here with the donkey while I and the boy go over there. We will worship and then we will come back to you."*

⁶ *Abraham took the wood for the burnt offering and placed it on his son Isaac, and he himself carried the fire and the knife. As the two of them went on together, ⁷ Isaac spoke up and said to his father Abraham, "Father?"*

"Yes, my son?" Abraham replied.

"The fire and wood are here," Isaac said, "but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?"

⁸ *Abraham answered, "God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son." And*

the two of them went on together.

⁹ *When they reached the place God had told him about, Abraham built an altar there and arranged the wood on it. He bound his son Isaac and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. ¹⁰ Then he reached out his hand and took the knife to slay his son. ¹¹ But the angel of the LORD called out to him from heaven, "Abraham! Abraham!"*

"Here I am," he replied.

¹² *"Do not lay a hand on the boy," he said. "Do not do anything to him. Now I know that you fear God, because you have not withheld from me your son, your only son."*

¹³ *Abraham looked up and there in a thicket he saw a ram caught by its horns. He went over and took the ram and sacrificed it as a burnt offering instead of his son. ¹⁴ So Abraham called that place The LORD Will Provide. And to this day it is said, "On the mountain of the LORD it will be provided."*

If you have been watching the US OPEN on television or in person, you know that it's a difficult course and especially when *those* guys have a hard time making par, you can imagine what most of us would do with a course like that. But I was interested in reading this morning in the Charlotte Observer about Tiger Woods talking about his dad and the influence he has had upon his life. His father Earl has had some poor health lately and especially when Tiger won the Masters about four weeks ago, he was not able to actually be there for the final 18 holes and the play-off, and so, one of the first places he certainly wanted to go — I guess the first place after he finished — was to see his dad at the house they were staying at.

Earl certainly taught him the game of golf very well. He would do drills with him so that he would learn to play under pressure. He says that age 11 was the first time he actually beat his dad; he was already out driving him, which was not unusual, but he actually beat him and says that's when he first time he did his fist pump, when he actually beat him. His dad didn't make much of it but Tiger certainly did, when he had finally beat his dad.

But his dad, especially from his experience from being in Vietnam, taught him how to deal with pressure and really have a military approach to the game of golf and to never quit. He gave him a hard time when he pouted one time, as an amateur. But he said that when he was putting in the playoff in the Masters that one of the things he tried so hard to do was to imagine what his father would be saying. What would his father's voice be saying? And he says that whether it's four feet or forty feet, he just imagines the ball going into the hole. (I've tried that; it doesn't work.) But for Tiger, it works real well. But I want you to hear that phrase: *He wanted to hear his father's voice.* And his father has had a great influence on him today.

Today on this Father's Day, I pray, and especially with this message about Abraham, that you will hear your Heavenly Father's voice. It's a voice that will let you know, regardless of whether you had a good father, no father, bad father, that there is a Heavenly Father that loves you with an everlasting love, and He wants to guide you in this great life that He has for you.

There are four words that I would describe Abraham as a guide for us today on this Father's Day.

The first of all is the word *call*. Abram was certainly someone that understood that God had called him. In Genesis, chapter 12, it says it this way, that God was teaching him to move geographically:

¹ *The LORD had said to Abram, "Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you.*

² *"I will make you into a great nation
and I will bless you;
I will make your name great,
and you will be a blessing.*

³ *I will bless those who bless you,
and whoever curses you I will curse;
and all peoples on earth
will be blessed through you."*

So here is this 75 year old man and his 65 year old wife. He said, "Leave familiar surroundings and go. I'm not going to tell you exactly where you are going to go, how long you are going to stay, all accommodations. Follow Me; obey Me."

So it was a great act of faith, especially to geographically separate. And those of you who have moved around, you know you pray more; you are more dependent on God when you go into a new community. Bishop McCleskey, on Saturday night, at the ordination service for the elders, was explaining to the Ordinands about the itinerate system:

"Not only have you been called to preach and called to the Methodist Church, but you have been called to an itinerate system. Now this is what it means: What is going to happen, the District Superintendent is going to call you up, and when they do that, you go and get some boxes. You bring those boxes back home and you put all your stuff in the boxes. Then you get the truck, and you put the boxes on the truck, and then you go to where they tell you to go. You unpack the boxes, and then, in a couple more years or so, thereabouts, the Superintendent will call you again. And you go repeat the process. You go and get some boxes; you get the truck, and that's the itinerate system."

And there is a lot of truth to that. But especially, there are some people that are called to, not only to preach, but to the Methodist itinerate system. But especially on this Father's Day, two calls I think are so important for fathers to answer. First of all is the call to be a Disciple of Jesus Christ. I found in my life, if you put God first, He will help you to be a better father. When Jesus called His Disciples, especially the fishermen, they left their nets and followed Him. It's costly Discipleship. It does involve a sacrifice. It does involve, sometimes, making difficult decisions, but it is the grandest calling in our lives. It is great, especially, for fathers. Your identity is not so much your work or how much money you make, or any of that stuff. Your identity is of a Disciple of Jesus Christ and that's what counts most of all. But especially within that call, though, is to realize that there is a call to be a father, that if God has blessed you with children, it

is a special calling. I remember going to my first Pastor-Parish meeting and talking about how I was going to spend my time and I remember them talking about, “You need to spend time with your boy. He is going to grow up on you quick.”

I didn't think that was true at that time, but it is true; they do grow up quickly. And I remember especially when the children were younger, I thought, well, you know, I had several churches, and I've got a lot to do; it's just a real struggle. But, I can tell you, those times I spent with my children growing up, I don't regret one minute. Kat, I always remember the time she had an operation and, you know, I think back, well, I made the decision to take a couple of days off work, and, you know, we played Barbies, and you know, that is a special time for us. The Church did just fine without me for a couple of days and I sure don't regret doing that.

And, you know, when you come to the end of your life, you Dads are not going to say, “I really wish I had worked more; I wish I hadn't taken that vacation.” No. They are eager to have their children to come and gather around them.

The godly father, first of all, God has a call on my life: It is a call to be a Christian. It is a call to be a father and be the very best that I can be. Abraham took that call.

And then secondly, he showed great courage. The second word is *courage*. Abram became prosperous and his nephew Lot became prosperous where they went. The men were arguing and so Abram was gracious. He said, “Lot, if you want the land on the left, I will take the right; if you want the land on the right, I will take the left. It's your choice. I am the older, but still, that's fine. You can go ahead and have it.”

That's the way he was. And so Lot kind of liked going near Sodom. He'd heard about Sodom. It was, well, Sodom was modern, and there are exciting things going on there. It's ungodly, but he had heard about it and he thought that would be a place to go near. And he kept his tent *near* there. Well, it wasn't long before his tent was inside of Sodom. Sodom was not only a wicked city but there was a tribal war described in Genesis chapter 14, and Lot, as well as others, are taken captive. So what does Abram do? “Well, it's too bad. You shouldn't have gone there anyway; I tried to warn you” No, he gets 318 men and courageously, not only rescues Lot, but many of the Sodomites and then they tried to reward him with a prize and he wouldn't agree to that. But he demonstrated great courage and what a great need. And when we answer God's call, oftentimes it takes courage, and God gives it to us.

Dick Hoyett is 65 years old and for the last 43 years he has shown great courage, as well as his son Rick. When Rick was born he had brain damage and doctors really didn't give him very much hope that he would be more than a vegetable, as they called it. But they did tests, and he felt like: You know, I think there is more going on here. And so they did some tests at age 11 and they said, “Well, we really don't think there is a lot of brain activity.” He said, “Why don't you tell him a joke?” And so they told him a joke. Well, he started laughing, the 11 year old. And so, they found a way to communicate with a computer and his first two words were “Go Bruins”. But one of the things that happened when Rick got into high school is that one of his friends had gotten injured in an accident. They did a charity race for

him and he told his dad, as he talked to him on his computer, "I'd love to be in a race."

And so, his out-of-shape dad decided to get in shape and be able to run in a race and be able to push him in a wheelchair and he said, "You know, I was disabled for several weeks when I was trying to get into shape."

But he got into shape and they started running races together. In fact, they have done marathons. Actually, they have gone through triathlons. I still haven't figured out how they swim, but somehow he does it. And they bike and run. And his son Rick says, "You know, when I'm in those races I don't feel disabled, and if I had one thing I could do, I wish I could push my dad in one of those races."

One of great needs for godly fathers is to demonstrate courage. I think of my own dad and I think of the courage he demonstrated. I think, what was it like going over on the ship to Europe during World War II? I think of the courage which he demonstrated in starting his own business and oftentimes the struggles with that. But I remember one of the greatest ways he demonstrated courage was his declining health, but he was courageous about it. He didn't ... (tape change)

... you are going to have this child, and so, they began to tell Abram, "We need to let him know what is happening." The judgment is crying out to the Lord about Sodom and God is starting to do something about it. So, we find out that Abram is quite a man of prayer; he starts praying for his family in Sodom.

And he says, "Lord, if there be 50 righteous people will you destroy the righteous with the wicked?"

And the Lord: "No, no I won't."

He starts thinking of what Sodom is like and he said, "Lord if there be 45, would you slay the righteous with the wicked?"

He says, "No, I won't; I won't slay the righteous with the wicked for 45."

Well, he keeps going down and he finally says, "Lord, if there be 30 would you slay the righteous with the wicked?"

"No, not for 30, I won't."

"Lord, I know I may be trying Your patience..." but he finally gets down to, "Lord, if there be 10 righteous, would you slay the righteous with the wicked?"

He said, "No, I won't."

Because of his prayers, at least Lot and his family were warned. Three of them, Lot and his two daughters, were saved from the destruction of Sodom, but think of the power of Abram's

prayers and how important it is for godly fathers to know to pray for their children. How do you do that? Well, three ways: One, I think it is extremely important to give thanks for your children. When couples are coming to have a Baptism I tell them, “This is a lot of what we do in a Baptism: We are giving thanks to God for the child you have been blessed with, especially infant baptism. There are going to be times where you are not going to be thankful for this child. You are going to want to send this child back — but the hospital won’t take them back. They are yours; that’s too bad. But we give thanks for the child because it is a blessing.

Another way you pray is for God’s *will* and God’s *love* to come forth in your child’s life. We are not just praying for the child to become a Christian; we want God to truly use them in a great way and that they discover God’s call and to follow that. We also pray, I believe we pray about everyday things. That is that, especially about their classmates, their activities, their sports, their boyfriends, girlfriends — all that everyday thing — you pray about that so that they especially will learn that God is interested in all things. But you pray. And in James it says, “The effectual prayer of a righteous man is a great power in it’s effect.” You pray for the children but they will know the embrace of not just you, but of the Heavenly Father.

Jimmy Carter, in one of his books, talks about as a young boy, going fishing. He had a good day fishing and they got a snapping turtle but as he and his buddy were going home, they recognized the tracks and they realized — uh oh, these are our tracks — and they were lost in the woods and they were frightened. They tried to think about what their parents had told them and they finally ended up at a house that was about 10 miles from their house. This gentleman was taking them home and they met Jimmy Carter’s dad in the truck. It was dark. His dad was obviously mad and as they got in the truck beside him he said, “Don’t you know ... I thought you knew better than that to get lost in the woods.”

But then his dad reached out an arm and gave him a strong hug. He said, “I’ll always remember my father’s embrace when I was lost,” after being lost in the woods. That’s why, when we pray for our children, we are praying that they know the embrace of the Father.

And the fourth word is *commitment*. This passage that we read this morning was a great faith test for Abraham. And it may seem a strange passage. You may think — well, is Abram just being like the Canaanites around them, child sacrifice? But it’s more of a test of faith. In Hebrews it gives us a little bit of insight because it says that Abram’s faith was tested and he believed that God would even raise Isaac back from the dead, so, he doesn’t know exactly how it is going to happen, but there have been other times in his life when he failed the faith test and he is not going to fail this time. There was one time — there was a famine; he went down to Egypt. He just had a hard time believing, even though he had been called and he had demonstrated courage as a warrior. He had a hard time believing that God was going to get him out of this situation so he lied to Pharaoh about his wife — “She’s not really my wife; she’s my sister” — because he was afraid that he would kill him to take Sarah and put in his harem. And so, he lied about it and got caught and I’m sure there were words about that.

This time he wants to be sure he passes this test and so he is determined. He goes out to Mt. Moriah, “I’m going to offer the sacrifice.” And he gets up there and you have to remember: Abraham is an old man; his son is a teenager. But his son believes in him and his son doesn’t

understand at all. But as he is ready to slay him, “Abraham, Abraham,” he hears. “Do not slay the child for now I know that you fear Him.”

There was a ram caught in the thicket and the ram was offered instead. He passed that test. God showed that incredible love for us when He sent His son to die upon the cross to die for us. Imagine what was going through our Heavenly Father’s heart when His son was on the cross saying, “Father forgive them for they know not what they do.” Or, “My God, My God. Why hath thou forsaken me?” And He died. But it is through that cross that now we have forgiveness of our sins. We have eternal life through faith in Jesus Christ.

Can you hear the voice of the Father today, that voice of love and that voice of guidance? Let me close by sharing what God really is like. He’s like a dad that runs to his child who is coming home. Jesus told the story of a man who had two sons, one older, one younger and the younger was given an inheritance. He did what he wanted with it. He wasted it; he had a good time. He ended up feeding pigs. He finally came to himself. That is, that the light came on. “You know, this is no way to live. Even my father’s servants had it better than this. I’m going to go home.”

I mean, he has changed. He is repentant. And when he comes home, his father sees him at a distance. No doubt that he has gone out there everyday at sunset, looking. “I hope this the day.” And he sees him. Does he just stand there? No. He runs. He runs to him and embraces him. That’s what our Father is like in heaven. Let us pray.

Father, we pray today that each one here today worshipping would hear Your voice — would hear Your voice of love and Your voice of guidance. Be a voice of hope, “I will never leave you or forsake you and I will love you with an everlasting love.” We pray this today in Jesus’ name. Amen.