

Our reading from Genesis records one of the most problematic passages in the Hebrew Scriptures. God's instruction to Abraham to sacrifice his only son Isaac can send chills up our spine. What kind of God would order such an act? What madness would lead Abraham to believe God required him to slay his son on an altar of wood.

Paul, writing to the Romans, asks the question that crosses all our minds from time to time: "If God is for us, who is against us?" But is God for us? Is he on our side? Abraham wasn't so sure. And, if we are honest, sometimes neither are we.

Abraham dreamed of a family but he had grown old and wondered if such a dream could ever come true. Like Abraham, we so want to believe God's promises are true, that grace matters and love will triumph, but like Abraham, we've lived long enough to know some dreams turn out to be nothing more than dreams.

Like Abraham, we wander through life from one job to another. If we are fortunate, we meet someone and experience that mysterious, wonderful moment we call "falling in love." We marry, build a life with that person, perhaps have a child or two or more, find ourselves in careers that may be wonderful or dreadful. Time passes quickly, the children grow, the marriage becomes the routine, work loses its luster and friendships come and go. And we can wonder what difference it makes if God for us?

Health issues bubble up with us or members of our family. Parents move down that rough road of aging and declining health, we lose a job and find another –

not really what we enjoy doing, but it pays the bills. We pray, but feel as if the heavens are deaf to us. We attend church now and then but find worship boring at times. If this is what it looks like to have God on our side, is he really much help?

We have our own issues but can we even imagine the terror that Abram faced?—tradition and his own people insist that God demands from Abram that one thing, that one precious gift, that one love he cannot imagine giving up. And we watch with horror as he built an altar of wood, bound his son with rope, and lay that life on the altar, raising the knife to end life and all hope as he knew it.

Then God intervenes and we find out that things weren't quite what they seem. Human sacrifice was a human custom thought to help in times of trouble – something man resorted to but God had not asked. God speaks to Abraham, and to us, saying in effect: “Don't think for a moment I want you to sacrifice your son. That was not my voice; that was never my will. Have faith that I want what is best for you, that I am on your side. Hear me and believe.”

This is what the disciples heard God say to them on that mount of Transfiguration. Yes, they had seen a vision like no other: their Master and Lord transfigured before them, joined by Moses and Elijah clothed in dazzling light. But more important than special effects on a mountain top are the words God speaks to them and to us: “This is my son, the Beloved – listen to him! He is there for you.”

Is God for us? Yes, so much so that God gave His only son for us. God is so for us, so with us, so in love with us that God allowed us to lay sinful hands

on **his** only Son, bind him to a cross of wood, and there murder him. God is so for us that not even our murderous behavior that dark and Good Friday could extinguish God's love for us. As Paul tells us, "He who did not withhold his only Son, will he not also give us everything else?" This means that we can lay to rest our wondering about God's care for us.

There will still be times when circumstances seem like dark storm clouds blocking out the light and joy of life: The diagnosis of a life-ending illness can do that. A spouse asking for a divorce can darken our days. A child finding the freedom that comes with age, only to throw common sense out the window can do that. In those moments, we can't help but ask again: Is God there for us?

God's Word today tells us God has not and will not abandon us to our fears. No matter what the circumstances may be, the good news is always inviting us to believe its life-giving promise. You may feel as if your child, your spouse, your job, a dear friend is bound on an altar of wood, but God has another story to tell –that is not his plan for us. God tells us he is so for us, he sent his only Son to show us not only the way out of whatever life throws us, but the way through it.

No matter what life seems to demand from us, we need to remember that God is on our side, desiring only what is good for us. This is the heart of our faith – God's unimaginable love for each and every one of us. It is so simple and yet so unlike any other experience we have as human beings.

This holy season of Lent is God's invitation to all of us to believe again that God is so for us, that he gave his only Son to be our Savior. God is so for us that there is nothing we can do that will ever change that. We might not return that love or even welcome that love but we can never change the indescribable love he has for us. In this holy season of lent we try to remove the obstacles that blind us to God's love, to how very much he is for us.