

Genesis 22:1-14 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 { ¹³ Many manuscripts of the Masoretic Text, Samaritan Pentateuch, Septuagint and Syriac; most manuscripts of the Masoretic Text a ram behind *him* } 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."

“Filletted and Fried”

My father and I had some pretty good times together when I was a young boy. I remember him trying to teach me to play guitar one Christmas morning when I was four or five. I remember the first time he gave me a sip of his beer. I was about four or five then too. It was pretty gross. If it weren't for peer pressure in my later teens I doubt I'd of took it up as a hobby. Dad taught me all kinds of things. How to use a hammer and a saw. How to frame in a wall and paint a house. How to mow grass and trim bushes. He left it to Granddaddy to show how to butcher a chicken. Dad taught me how to plant and tend a garden. He taught me the basics of hunting. But I think we both lost our nerve for hunting one morning when we had just finished hunting and were putting the guns back into the car he almost accidentally shot my lower leg off while making sure there wasn't a shell in chamber. Apparently there was still a shell in the chamber. I really don't think Dad ever hunted again after that.

Some of my fondest childhood memories are the times that Dad took me fishing. I'd spend the night at Grandma's with him and we'd get up real early. So, did Grandma and she always had breakfast ready. We would drive about fifteen minutes to a place called Jones' Hollow where the city of Waynesboro had made a small reservoir. We'd hike in a couple of miles to the lake. There was a row boat there that came complete with a few small holes courtesy of some hunter. It didn't matter. We'd take it out in the middle of the lake and sit there catching blue gill all morning. He'd show me how to clean them, but he always did most of the cleaning. Then we'd either grill them or fry them.

My father was also a man of faith. Though it took losing nearly everything for Dad to come to faith in Christ. To his credit, he did not withhold his youngest son from the Lord but rather strongly encouraged me to pursue what it was Jesus was calling me to and in my case it was pastoral ministry. I guess he saw something that nobody else saw. Yet, he didn't have the faith of Abraham. Although he did almost shoot my leg off, he never tried to filet and fry me. But, I don't think God holds that against him.

Now, I've recounted this story to you before of how when I was sixteen, I went to spend a weekend with my father and for some strange reason he decided to talk to me about the Lord. In the midst of that conversation he asked me if I had ever considered becoming a minister. My answer was that it was something that had been floating around in the back of my mind but I would rather consider first being a lawyer or our doing something in the field of science. He didn't push me, but that conversation sprouted a seed that a couple of years later took root. Once it did, Dad more than anyone else encouraged me. I hold Dad responsible for instilling in me the notion to pursue what God was calling me to rather than what I or other people thought I ought to do. He really was the only one in the family that I could talk to about my calling and not feel defensive or inadequate. My dad was a good father to me and what made him good was that he encouraged me to pursue what Jesus Christ wanted for my life rather than just tell me to go figure out what I wanted to do or what I could do to the best of my ability and be successful.

To reflect upon this a bit, one of the most important life questions parents can discuss with their children is “What is the Lord calling you to do?” It is even a question that grandparents should discuss with their grandchildren. And I'll push the scope a bit further, it is the most important question the church can ask of its young people. One of the greatest sins the church, our church, can commit against the children we have been entrusted by our heavenly Father to raise and nurture in the faith of Jesus Christ is that we don't go that extra step and ask them what ministry is Jesus calling them to do. We typically look at our responsibility as the nurturing family of God as being simply to raise them as good people who believe Christian beliefs. We teach them that faith will help them as they go through life in the pursuit of happiness. There is nothing good in raising good kids with Christian beliefs if we only set them loose in the world without a sense of being called to work in the kingdom of God. To not make them aware that Jesus is calling them to work in his kingdom in the end is nothing less than withholding our children from the LORD. Simply raising our children to be good people with Christian beliefs is doing little to impress upon them that they are disciples of Jesus Christ upon whom he has a claim. You see, it is to him that we belong, not to ourselves, and therefore, our lives are not our own to do with them as we please.

Now, I've done a good job of avoiding the horror of this story of Abraham and Isaac. We have idolized Abraham as the father of faithfulness and in so doing we gloss over the utter horror of that father/son outing. If this would have happened today most likely the two young men that accompanied them would have contacted Children's Aid who would have come and removed Isaac from the care of Abraham and Sarah. Then, once the whole incident hit the papers they would have been branded as religious nuts. But, Abraham wasn't crazy. God had truly spoken to him directly; called him by name and asked him to do something really horrific just to test Abraham's faithfulness. And then for Abraham to carry through with it. Just try to image how Isaac must have been utterly terrified; Abraham too.

I don't have the time to adequately address this story and I really don't think I am adequately gifted to do that. The only thing that I will bring from it this morning of a theological nature is to say that when we baptize our children we are in essence taking the walk that Abraham and Isaac took and laying them on the altar of sacrifice where Jesus Christ has taken there place once and for all. But, and to bring us back to where we were before, having brought them that far if we do not then encourage them to listen for the call of Christ and to the vocation that he is calling them to, then all we do is nullify the walk of faith that we have attempted to undergo with them; the walk that says we have each died with Jesus Christ in his death and in him by the gift of the Holy Spirit whom he has sent to live in us each, we all are being made alive in him to live as his disciples through whom he will bring forth his kingdom.

So how do we approach our children to address the seeds of their calling in Christ Jesus? Well, we must first feel that call ourselves. We, the adults, must have wrestled with Christ enough to be able to say that we have heard him call us by name just as he did Abraham and that we know we are living in and ministering in him and his kingdom rather than just doing our own thing hoping that we are faithful. We, the adults, must know personally and deeply each ourselves that we belong to Jesus Christ; that we have been and will be raised from death by his own life and that we are made alive in him for work in his kingdom. We must be able to look at our children and say with deep conviction that what I do is what Jesus is calling me. Our calling arises mostly from the questions of Jesus where do you want me to serve you and who are the people you have called me to be your ambassador. My father sold insurance. He always considered that to be the ministry to which Jesus had called him. It gave him the opportunity to personally make a difference in the lives of so many people. You know, when he visited a home it was very much like a pastoral visit. The people got the sense that he was someone who genuinely cared for them. Selling the insurance was secondary.

So, the first step in talking about calling with our young people is knowing that calling ourselves. Next, it is just having the courage to talk with our young people about what Jesus is calling them to and impressing upon them that he has a claim on them. We must invite them to pray and explore their guts for that call. You see, I know for a fact that by the time I was sixteen and even though I wasn't all that churchd growing up, Jesus had at sometime put the call into my gut and my dad with that talk was simply awakening it. But, we face a particular problem today. We do not see a lot of young people around the church today. Nevertheless, we still have them in our lives and it is us that Christ is sending to them with the simple question of “Have you ever considered that God has something in the works for you?” If the young aren't here then we simply must go to them. So let us go. Amen.