

Stretching Toward Sunday

Thoughts, readings and reflections
based on this week's lectionary readings

June 29, 2014

Proper 8A/Ordinary 13A/Pentecost +3

The readings this week:

- Genesis 22:1-14 ◦ Psalm 13
- Romans 6:12-23 ◦ Matthew 10:40-42

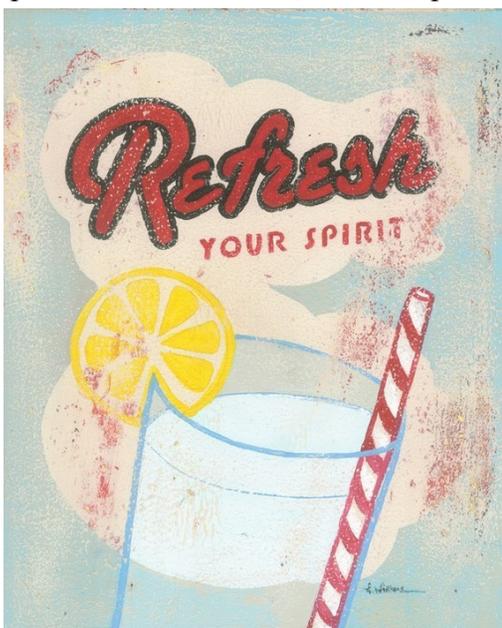


[Click here to read this week's Scriptures](#)

Cup of Sacrifice

I sometimes imagine the passages for the week to be in conversation with one another. In the same way that I seek out a theme to tie the lectionary texts together, this can be difficult at times. I'm not suggesting it to be an academic endeavor either. It is just that when I read the four (or more) texts listed in the lectionary, I wonder what they can be saying to one another in addition to the reader. This is a difficult week for many reasons, not the least of which is the Genesis story of Abraham dragging his son up a mountain and almost using him as a human sacrifice.

What does a text that has Jesus empowering and uplifting disciples to offer a cup of cold water to God's children as the very representatives of Christ himself have to say to a text that has a father almost killing his own son before a ram is found to be stuck in a thicket? To be completely honest, I'd prefer to just skip the Genesis text this week, pretend it doesn't exist, chalk it up to some mistake



made along the way in thousands of years of storytelling and translation. I've never been able to stomach it very well.

Oh, I could write about sacrifices that we must make in our lives, how we

must be willing to give up the very thing that means the most to us, in order to give our whole selves to God. I could write about how God will always provide what is needed for us even in a moment that seems to be so completely desperate and painful. We've all heard those sermons many times. Good sermons. Good lessons to learn. It just doesn't deal with the issue of God asking for this sacrifice or that an innocent child almost died because of it. So, can't we just pretend it doesn't exist at all?

Maybe Abraham just *thought* he heard the voice of God. There is nothing in the text to support my saying this, but it sure would make it easier for me to think that a human got it wrong instead of thinking that a loving God had asked for such a horrifying thing to be done. If you are reading this and hope that I come to some great, clear, uplifting answer for the trouble in this Genesis passage, I'll save you the trouble of reading any further. I don't understand it and that is what I am saying. Often we don't understand. We think we should take path A only to find ourselves a few intersections down the way to learn that it really should have been path B.

If Jesus is in conversation with Abraham from the Matthew text to the Genesis text, all I can see that he may be saying is reminding all of us that we won't always know the way. Sometimes we will even mistake our way for his way. And, even so, he provides what we need, allows us to represent him on this earth to all the parents who feel like they are sacrificing their own children on all kinds of altars.

I prefer to just not think about this story of Abraham and Isaac, but the lectionary does not allow that. So, maybe what we really need to ask in relation to these texts is about the ways in which the Church is representing the Christ to a world that feels desperate, confused, in pain, and willing to sink into violence in search for answers. I think it is time to find our way out of the thicket and offer them a drink of water. [Miriam's Tambourine](#)

[Refresh Your Spirit by Jeanne Winters](#)

Reflecting on the Word



1st Reading: [Genesis 22:1-14](#)

Tell God about any pain you are suffering right now. Remember that James says trials develop perseverance. What do the details of the narrative reveal about Abraham's response to this incredibly difficult situation? How does God's provision for Abraham in 22:13-14 fulfill the confidence he expressed earlier (22:5, 8)? In 22:12 the Lord says, "Now I know that you fear God because you have not withheld from me your son, your only son." Based on Abraham's example, what do you think it means to fear God? Have you ever faced a situation in which obedience to God required you to give up someone or something you loved? Explain. [Quiet Time Bible Study, InterVarsity Press](#)



Like Abraham, you may impact the lives of those whom you never meet. Be obedient to God's request, even if it doesn't make sense from a worldly point of view. Perhaps the sacrifices you make today for Christ's sake will bless others for generations to come.

Psalm Reading: [Psalm 13](#)

At what times in your life have you struggled with doubt? Talk openly with God about it; he wants to know your true feelings. The author begins with two questions that express his doubts about God. What are his concerns? Why is it helpful to express our doubts to God? The author not only has questions about God, he also has questions about himself. He asks, "How long must I wrestle with my thoughts and every day have sorrow in my heart?" What is it about the experience of doubt that causes people to question themselves? The writer ends the prayer of doubt with a statement of trust (vv. 5-6). How is it possible to doubt and trust at the same time? When is it difficult for you to follow the writer's example in expressing your doubts about God? How might it give you courage in your spiritual struggle to know that the Bible gives voice to doubts? [Quiet Time Bible Study, InterVarsity Press](#)

Praying Toward Sunday

Father, I'm so grateful that You have a purpose and a plan for my life. Please reveal Your will to me and empower me to obey it willingly and faithfully. Increase my faith that I may be a blessing to the world around me for Your sake and for Your glory. In Jesus' name, Amen.

[In Touch Ministries](#)

3rd Reading: [Romans 6:12-23](#)

When you became a Christian, was the change in your life dramatic, gradual or imperceptible? Explain. Whether it has taken place slowly or quickly, praise God for the change he has worked in your life. Paul compares both our old life and our new to slavery. Why is this analogy appropriate in each case? Paul uses baptism, slavery and marriage to illustrate the differences between our old life and our new life. What common themes are emphasized in these illustrations? What sins are you particularly struggling to free yourself of? What assurance and encouragement is Paul giving us in your struggle against sin? [Quiet Time Bible Study, InterVarsity Press](#)

4th Reading: [Matthew 10:40-42](#)

Have you ever known someone who seemed to like you only for what you could give them? What did it feel like? What does Jesus promise to those who are receptive to our message? In what ways have you found rest in your life by coming to Jesus? [Quiet Time Bible Study, InterVarsity Press](#)

When your life seems like a desert,
Dry and barren and unblessed,
Jesus longs to give you water;
Go to Him and be refreshed.

—K. De Haan

