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St. Dunstan's, Bethesda
Proper 8 (A) - 28 June 2026
Genesis 22:1-14
Psalm 13
Matthew 10:40-42

We Might Be Wrong

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, Amen.

I imagine that most of us are familiar with the classic comic strip *Peanuts*, by Charles Schultz. I'm a huge fan. Frankly, Snoopy is one of my heroes: Fearless, persistent, imaginative, loving, and deeply insightful, Snoopy has a pithy way of commenting on the human condition – which isn't bad for a beagle! In one of my favorite scenes, Snoopy is sitting on top of his doghouse, typing intently (as dogs do...). His human, Charlie Brown, comes along and says,

I hear you're writing a book on theology. I hope you have a good title.

And in the thought bubble over his head, Snoopy responds,

I have the perfect title...

"Has it ever occurred to you that you might be wrong?"



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What a concept.

So much theological ink has been spilt over the millennia out of the conviction that one's particular faith tradition, or denomination, or school of thought, has a monopoly on the truth. Everyone who doesn't understand God the same way is, at best, misguided – or at worst, a heretic.

So much blood has been shed – and continues to be shed, today – as a result of that conviction, too.

In our own day, the unsettling resurgence of Christian nationalism underscores the danger of connecting the dots between ideology and political power – especially when wielding that power, in the Name of God, leads to oppression, or violence, or death.

While the Episcopal Church is far from perfect, Lord knows, one of the primary reasons that I found my home here is that we resist *dogma*, the uncritical teaching of – and, I would say, blind allegiance to – a particular, often narrow, theological interpretation. Instead, this tradition tends to understand faith as a “broad tent,” with room for a variety of expressions of belief. It values the God-given gift of *reason* and allows and encourages each of us to “work out [our] own salvation with fear and trembling,” in the words of the Apostle Paul (Phil. 2:12).

Each of us needs to wrestle with our understanding of Who God is and what God wants for us and all of Creation, based on Scripture, tradition, and – indeed – reason.

Does this particular teaching, or theological interpretation, make *sense*, given what we know about God – especially, as Christians, given what we know about God through the life, teaching, and actions of Jesus?

Sometimes Episcopalians are characterized as weak, or wishy-washy, because we avoid being absolute. We tend not to endorse black-and-white thinking, but rather prefer to hang out in the gray area in-between.

Episcopalians are “both/and,” not “either/or,” people.

If that makes us weak, then so be it. Personally, I would prefer to allow room for conversation than to be so sure of my correctness that I am willing to harm others for the sake of being “right.”

A little humility goes a long way.

This is the interpretive framework that I would like us to apply to this morning’s reading from Hebrew Scripture – one of the most, if not *the* most, disturbing scenes in the Bible, to my mind.

Known variously as “the near-sacrifice of Isaac,” or in Jewish tradition the *akedah*, the “binding of Isaac,” this is a horrifying moment.

Let’s not sugar-coat it.

Genesis 22 is an example of what the late feminist biblical scholar Phyllis Tribble called “texts of terror”:¹ scriptural passages that have been used as instruments of oppression, especially of the marginalized.

This story is about violence, and childhood trauma, and the silencing of Sarah, Isaac’s mother. She isn’t even in the scene at all.

If you were familiar with this passage before today, you might have heard it as an example of Abraham’s faithfulness – something along the lines of “Abraham trusted God so much that he was willing to kill his beloved, long-awaited son because God told him to.”

¹ Tribble, Phyllis. *Texts of Terror: Literary-Feminist Readings of Biblical Narratives*. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984).

Or so he thought.

I certainly was raised with that interpretation. I vividly remember being asked to color pictures of this story in Sunday School when I was growing up. In fact, just to test that memory I Googled “Genesis 22 coloring pages,” and what popped up first was a creepy image of Abraham and Isaac, walking along with warm smiles on their faces, accompanied by a cute sheep. The captions reads,

God will provide for himself the lamb.



Talk about childhood trauma.

Friends, we sanitize this passage at our own peril, and at the peril of anyone whom we are willing to “sacrifice” for the sake of our belief that we know what God wants from us.

I’ll say more about that in a moment.

For now, I would like us to consider whether Abraham might be *wrong*.

Abraham, the “Father of the Faith” in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, might just have misunderstood God.

Maybe that sounds like heresy to you – especially if this is a treasured story from your own faith development.

But I ask you to hear me out.

So often this text is used to exemplify blind faith, holding up Abraham as an exemplar of what it means to trust in God. We tend to make the passage about the human, rather than about the Divine.

Abraham often is seen as the hero here, willing to do the unthinkable because he believed that that was what God asked of him. Remember that child sacrifice was a commonplace in other Ancient Near East traditions, required by the gods in order to appease them. But as it explicitly says in Leviticus (20:2-5) and elsewhere in Torah, YHWH – the God of the Hebrew people – does *not*.

What does that suggest?

I do not mean to sound flippant, but as far as I can tell there was no one standing there with a recording device to capture the voice of God at that moment. I don’t doubt for a moment that Abraham *perceived* that God told him to sacrifice his son, and he later told the story around the campfire and it eventually became Scripture.

But what if he was wrong?

What if, what Abraham *believed* to be true of God, based on the teachings of the Ancient Near Eastern tradition with which he was raised, wasn’t actually true of God at all?

An Episcopal priest who writes blogs on biblical texts posted that he asked his rabbi friend what the Jewish tradition does with this story and stories like it in

which God seems to condone violence and killing. And Rabbi Joe responded, “Nothing. That’s not who God is. We ignore them.”²

That’s not who God is.

That speaks volumes, doesn’t it?

Has it ever occurred to you that you might be wrong?

As Christians, we understand God through the life, teaching, and actions of Jesus, the ultimate revelation of Who God is. And Jesus is very clear: In Matthew 9, He tells the Pharisees, “Go and learn what this means, ‘I desire mercy, not sacrifice’” (Mt. 9:13). And Jesus isn’t just making this up; He’s quoting the prophet Hosea.

I suspect that Abraham, the Father of the Faith, might just have gotten it wrong. He might have misunderstood God. And thanks be to God – literally – he is stopped before he can do the unthinkable.

There may be a lesson in here for us, too.

It is fitting that we should read this story, this “text of terror,” today, the day on which we celebrate “Pride Sunday.” Today we assert, unapologetically, that we believe that every person is created in the image of God, is precious in God’s sight, and therefore is worthy of respect and dignity. This claim is fundamental to who we are as Christians, and it is baked into our Baptismal Covenant.

This crazy notion is also one of the reasons that the Episcopal Church is sometimes criticized as “weak,” or “wishy-washy” – or “radical” – because we hold that every human being as a beloved child of God.

So be it.

If that’s what it means to be weak or radical, then sign me up.

²<https://interruptingthesilence.com/2017/07/02/a-fathers-faith-or-a-fathers-certitude-a-sermon-on-genesis-221-14/>

Some will say that the Pride movement is unnecessary or passé, especially in 21st-century America, given marriage equality and an overall shift in cultural understanding about gender identity.

Alas, would that were the case.

Here are some sobering statistics from the Trevor Project, the leading national nonprofit focused on suicide prevention and crisis intervention for LGBTQ+ young people:

- LGBTQ+ youth and young adults are more than four times as likely to attempt suicide than their peers.
- A 2024 survey found that 39% of LGBTQ+ young people seriously considered attempting suicide in the past year, including roughly half of transgender and nonbinary youth.³

These aren't ancient statistics. They are very recent numbers.

As Christians called to love our neighbor and to respect the dignity of every human being, we have a moral obligation to do something about this.

As a friend of mine who is gay says, “for anyone who remains silent while others live in fear, please know that you are part of the burden that they are carrying.”

Children are being sacrificed every day, not by the blade of a knife but by the sword of intolerance, prejudice, discomfort, or misunderstanding

What do we know about Who God is and what God wants for humanity – especially through the life, teaching, and actions of Jesus?

God's love is an unimpeachable truth.

³ <https://www.thetrevorproject.org/resources/article/facts-about-lgbtq-youth-suicide/>

If we disagree about the limits or expectations or expression of that love, let's talk about it. Let's pray together. But whatever we do, let us not be complicit in the "texts of terror" of today.

Amen.