

Title: Give Light to My Eyes  
Date: 7/2/2023 (Proper 8, Year A)  
Location: St. Alban's Episcopal Church  
Service: 10am Holy Eucharist (Hybrid)  
Readings: [Genesis 22:1-14](#); [Psalm 13](#); [Romans 6:12-23](#); [Matthew 10:40-42](#)  
Video Link: [https://youtu.be/9KhXO\\_ZP71Y?t=1674](https://youtu.be/9KhXO_ZP71Y?t=1674)

Look upon me and answer me, O LORD my God;  
give light to my eyes, lest I sleep in death. (Psalm 13:3)  
**Amen.**

Early Christian Theology was one of the classes I had to take my first semester in seminary. I was already nervous about going back to school. I had been fifteen years since I'd taken bluebook exams and written papers. Then during orientation, I found out that this class, which I was required to take, was nicknamed "The Bloodbath." The nickname came from all the markups in red ink that you'd find on your papers and exams.

Early Christian Theology was also called Patristics, because we studied the writing of the early church fathers up to the Medieval period. And yes, just the church fathers. We only read one thing written by a woman, and that was the martyrdom account of a Roman noblewoman named Perpetua and her slave woman Felicitas.

Going into that class, it felt like the lives of these theologians were so different from mine. Many of them had been immersed in the worldviews of Greek philosophers in a way I've never been. They were men of a certain time and place, and I am an Asian American woman in the 21st century. I knew I was going to learn a lot; there was a whole lot to learn. That's why I was in seminary. But would their writings just be stuff I had to memorize, or would there be a sense of connection, a feeling of kinship?

The beauty of Christianity, of the Christian tradition that we follow, is that ours is a unity that doesn't require uniformity. We don't have to be the same; our differences are important because they help us see more clearly. God gives light to our eyes by helping us see through each other's eyes.

The more we learn to do that, the less likely we will sleepwalk through life, and the more we will be fully awake.

The more we learn to do that, the less likely we'll stumble through the world like the living dead, and the more we will be fully alive.

And the hard stories, the ones that we really wrestle with, can be an opportunity for God to give light to our eyes so that we can be more fully awake and more fully alive.

None of us read Scripture in a vacuum. In the Episcopal Church we talk about the three-legged stool of Scripture, Tradition, and Reason. Why three? Three is an

important number, and it makes for a less wobbly stool than just one leg or two. The Methodists added “experience,” and you might have your own metaphor for reading critically.

To be clear, there is no pure, unbiased way to read the Bible. We all bring **something** of ourselves to it. Even the choice to read the Bible literally, as scientific fact or a document dictated by God, comes with its own set of assumptions and beliefs.

And when it comes to determining whether sin or righteousness has dominion over us, a big concern of Paul’s in today’s readings, the same assumptions and beliefs that affect how we read and what we see in the readings will have a big impact on what we perceive as sin and what we perceive as righteousness.

This is how people can read the same or similar translations of the Bible and come up with opposite positions on whether or not women can preach and lead in church, on whether we should abolish or uphold the institution of slavery, on whether God condemns or loves people who are LGBTQIA+. As the w(W)ord of God speaks to us, our assumptions and beliefs affect **what** we hear and **how** we hear.

Last week we heard a story about Abraham and Sarah kicking their slave-woman Hagar out of their household not once but twice. This week, we have another story we might be tempted to gloss over.

In the oldest versions of this text, there were no chapter or verse numbers, no punctuation, not even **vowels**. Yet some translations preface this story with a heading, and that heading tells us a lot about how the translators and editors heard this story.

Some examples are Abraham Tested (NIV), the Offering of Isaac (Amplified Bible), the Sacrifice of Isaac (ESV), the Command to Sacrifice Isaac (NRSV), and the Lord Tells Abraham to Offer Isaac as a Sacrifice (CEV)<sup>1</sup>.

The way these headings are constructed, the organization of subjects and objects and verbs, gives the impression that this story, or the lesson we’re supposed to learn from this story, is more straightforward than it actually is.

Some put the focus on sacrifice. Some Christians see this as the precursor to God sacrificing God’s only Son. But as Andrew McGowan, an old professor of mine, wrote this week, “This story is about sacrifice in the sense that the Noah story is about navigation, or the Parable of the Sower is about agriculture. In none of these cases is the named element the point of the story.”<sup>2</sup> He also reminded us that the crucifixion shouldn’t be seen as a religious ritual; it’s judicial murder.

Rabbi Danya Ruttenberg explained that some saw this as punishment for Abraham and Sarah sending away Hagar and Ishmael. Some see this as setting up an

argument against the ancient practice of child sacrifice. Other see in this the necessity of taking a leap of faith.<sup>3</sup>

This is not an easy piece of Scripture. God tells Abraham to offer up his only son, his beloved son, as a burnt offering.

And how did Abraham respond?

He didn't reason with God, nor did he ask any questions. He didn't appeal to God's sense of justice and mercy as he did when he bargained with God for the lives of the righteous people in Sodom (Gen 18:22-33). Side note, this is not the same story as the one with Lot and his daughters.

There is no record of Abraham saying a single word to Sarah. I want to be careful not to read modern notions of marriage into their relationship, but Sarah has been his partner. She left their clan with him when he told her God commanded them to leave his country and his kindred (Gen 12). She laughed as he did when she heard that God promised them a son in their old age (Gen 17 and 18), and in fulfillment of that promise she gave birth to Isaac.

The commands and promises of God are not unfamiliar to her, yet Abraham still felt that he had to go behind her back. If he couldn't even share it with her, then maybe he wasn't actually confident that he had heard the voice of God.

Tradition holds that this was a test after many other tests.

Tradition also holds that he passed the test. He heard a divine command from God, and even though God asked him to kill the very embodiment of his hope for the future that God promised, he placed his trust in God. He obeyed God without question. So, the angel tells Abraham now that God knows he will not withhold anything from God, not even his only son, God will bless him and all the generations that will come after him,

This is the way the story is told, and some would say that these are the lessons we are supposed to take away, because we know how the story ends...for Abraham.

But I wonder...

What if we **don't** accept the assumption that Abraham made the only choice possible, that this was the only right choice?

What if God sent the angel out of **mercy** and blessed Abraham and his future generations **despite** Abraham's choices, not because of them?

What lesson would we learn about faith and trust if we heard this story from Sarah's point of view? Or Isaac's? This event left its mark on them. Sarah dies in the next chapter of Genesis (Gen 23), soon after these events. Isaac is the most quiet and passive of the patriarchs. He marries the woman his father's servant brings him, he picks up and

goes whenever and wherever God tells him to, and he ends up blessing the son his wife tricks him into blessing, not the son he intends to bless.

What lesson would we learn about faith and trust if we heard this story from the point of view of the lads who served him? If you thought that I might be willing to sacrifice my adorable little nephew, you'd probably all look at me differently and think twice about following the faith tradition I represent.

Those three words, "God tested Abraham," are paired with the ending we know. In the Hebrew Bible, Abraham is honored as one of the patriarchs of the Jewish people, one of their founding fathers if you will. In the New Testament, Paul holds him up as an example of faithfulness for the followers of Christ, as someone who trusted God above all and placed God above all. It sounds like he passed the test; it sounds like this is the only way to pass the test.

But what if Abraham had faith that God's promises would be fulfilled even if he did not offer up his son as a burnt offering?

What if this is about how God loves us, tragic flaws and all?

What if Abraham had talked to Sarah, and together they made a different choice?

What if this is a story about how the little ones can trust in God's justice and mercy even when they can't trust their own parents? After all, parents are human, too.

Some people say that we can't and shouldn't apply modern values to ancient stories. The power of stories in the Bible is that they remind us that even as the world around us changes, some things about the human condition stay the same. We read the Bible for those truths; it helps us see the ways all of us humans struggle with how to love and and be in right relationship with God, and how to love and be in right relationship with one another.

As I learned in Patristics, those early church fathers asked a lot of the same questions we do. They struggled with the ideas of sin and righteousness. They wondered why God would have hardened Pharaoh's heart, and they wondered why God would have asked Abraham to do this.

The questions we are willing and NOT willing to ask when we read this story say a lot about us. The assumptions and beliefs we have about God and free will, faith and trust, are reflected in how we much we accept this story, and the kinds of questions we ask of this story.

What does my reading say about me and yours about you? If you were to give this story a title, what would you call it? What do **you** see that will help you be more awake and come more fully alive?

---

<sup>1</sup> Did a search in Bible Gateway

<sup>2</sup> <https://abmcg.substack.com/p/sacrifice-slavery-and-the-promise>

<sup>3</sup> [HTTPS://LIFEISASACREDTEXT.SUBSTACK.COM/P/WHY-DIDNT-ABRAHAM-PROTEST-ON-BEHALF](https://lifeisasacredtext.substack.com/p/why-didnt-abraham-protest-on-behalf)