

Judica, 2006
Text: John 8:49-56
Trinity Lutheran, Worden, IL & Zion Lutheran, Carpenter, IL
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✠Grace, Mercy, and Peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ ✠

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

Abraham lived in a world of pagan gods and child sacrifice. It was no strange thing for one of these gods to demand that parents kill their children to appease them. The most famous was Molech. His bronze statue with arms extended was set in the middle of a fire. And when the statue glowed red with heat the first-born child was put in his arms to die an agonizing death. And no doubt Molech, or whatever his true name was, and all his demon compatriots roared with delight at the depravities of fallen men, men without God.

But Abraham knew the true God. He knew his love and kindness, his covenant, his promise. The Lord had given him this miraculous son Isaac when he and Sarah were far too old to become parents. This son of the promise was Abraham's joy, the key to the Lord's fulfillment of his covenant with Abraham to multiply his descendants as the sand of the seashore and to be a blessing to all the families of the earth.

Thus what must Abraham have thought when God told him to take Isaac to an altar, slit his throat, and burn him in sacrifice? What did Isaac think as he carried the wood that would be the instrument of his sacrifice? Had God gone

mad? Was he no better than Molech? Have not you been tempted with these same questions? Have you not called out against the Lord that he was unfair and uncaring? That he abandoned you or had gone mad with cruelty toward you?

Repent of your evil thoughts and accusations against your Father in heaven. The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob is no Molech. For behold: the knife is staid in Abraham's hand by the Messenger of the Lord who says that he is the Lord. The first-born son of Abraham is freed because God will provide a Lamb. And do not be fooled: the ram caught in the thicket is not that Lamb. A ram isn't a Lamb at all. The Lamb is the Messenger of the Lord, the one who before Abraham IS, who can truly say I AM in the absolute sense, the true only-begotten son who carries the wood of his own sacrifice, the substance of which Isaac was but a shadow, the true sacrifice, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world: Jesus.

And thus Abraham saw the day of Jesus and rejoiced. He rejoiced because in our Lord Jesus, God in the flesh, the true God takes upon himself the load that Isaac could not carry. For make no mistake, there is no forgiveness of sins without the shedding of blood. Sin causes death and mankind is steeped in sin. But the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob is no demonic lord who delights in the death of the sinner. Rather, he provides life to sinners by himself tasting death on the tree of the cross.

For behold, Jesus comes to the Temple, the place of sacrifice with the smell of death always in the air. He comes there because he is the substance of which those sacrifices and that temple were but the shadow. They all pointed at him: there is a sacrifice for sin, there is no forgiveness without blood, the Innocent would die for the guilty. And here he is, the innocent one, the Lord our Righteousness, the Suffering Servant and Man of Sorrows. And his own reject him – they cannot find fault with his teaching or his life – they cannot make the charge of demonic possession stick – so, filled with Satanic rage, they rush at him with stones. But it is not yet Jesus' hour. So he slips out of the Temple. But his hour does come. And when it comes the Son lays down his life, and the true Temple not made with human hands is torn down, only to be raised up again in three days.

So rejoice this Passion Sunday. Cry out with the Psalmist for the Lord to vindicate you by the blood of this Lamb. Today our Lenten fast increases as we ponder the mystery of God himself pouring out his life for us on the cross. Our voices waver as we mute our songs of glory to God. Our eyes hunger to see the cross of our salvation which we hide from our vision.

In Mel Gibson's movie about the Passion of the Lord, much is presented faithfully and some is presented wrongly. But the movie is worth the price of purchase for just one scene. As the real Isaac, our Lord Jesus, carries the wood of his sacrifice to mountain where the Lord provides, already he is beaten and

bleeding, he stumbles and falls to the ground. At this the Blessed Virgin rushes forward to her Son as any mother would and Gibson puts into Jesus' mouth here with the cross on his back, the words from John's vision, "Behold, Mother, I am making all things new."

That is exactly right. It is the Passion and Death of Jesus that make all things new. Where there was death, there is now life. Where there was sin, there is now forgiveness. Thus, dear Christian, will you not hasten to the Table of the Lord to receive the fruits of his Passion? For the Passion of the Lord is not something to be watched on the movie screen or sentimentally to be remembered. The Passion of the Lord is something to be experienced in the here and now; something to be received. For your Lord Jesus invites you to come forward and eat his very body which was broken for you and drink the very blood that purchased your salvation. What a blessed gift! Truly you proclaim the Lord's death and receive the salvation won by it in receiving this Sacrament of Christ's Body and Blood which is the center of our worship. Thus, this Passion Sunday and on every Sunday hunger for this gift of the Lord's Passion and with mouth and soul receive him who died to free you from your sins.

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

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Now the peace of God which passes all understanding will keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.

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