

## **Genesis 22:1-14 - Matthew 10: 40-42**

### **Sermon 28<sup>th</sup> June 2020 – Jane Brough**

Was this one ask too much, after all that Abraham had been through? Imagine that if a film was being made of Genesis 22, there would be poignant scenes of Abraham agonising over whether or not to comply with this command tender scenes of Sarah packing the men's lunch for their 'day out', perhaps a series of shots of Isaac with his pets. It's the stuff of which films are made of. But the biblical authors were not interested in such matters and perhaps indeed, Abraham did not go to hell and back, his faith may have been so strengthened in the 25 years of waiting for the promise of Isaac to come true, that he trusted God to what was best, every time.

Yes such faith may leave us speechless with awe. But what an example Abraham is to follow! When God seems to have deserted us in our time of greatest need he really has not. We like Abraham must believe this or we shall tear ourselves 'spiritually speaking' to shreds.

Isaac had not been told the true object of the journey – not that Abraham dodged the issue, but he would not tell the boy what he believed would not happen. Yet as Isaac was bound to the wood, the young man must have wondered what his loving father was about, in much the same way that even unspoken, we remind our father that he too is supposed to love us and not to bring us into certain situations.

Isaac's acceptance of the situation, like Abraham's is a wonderful example of spiritual stability and faith.

So the biblical author may have omitted the agony! But agony, if any there was, would be unneeded. Do we ever reflect on the energy we waste in agonising over things that never come to pass? And whatever does come to pass, does simply that, it doesn't remain forever.

Today's Gospel reading is about the formation of a community. These verses come at the end of a long chapter in which Jesus chooses the twelve apostles and sends them out on a mission. Their particular role is to preach the good news of Jesus to the Jewish people, twelve of them for the twelve tribes. Their message is that the Kingdom of Heaven has come near in the person of Jesus.

Jesus explains that their mission will not be wholly successful. Jesus is talking to the disciples, but Matthew is also talking here to the early Church, about opposition, about court appearances and even death sentences, about deep divisions within families. The Gospel message is unbelievable to Jewish ears, its hard to accept and it causes trouble. It disturbs the settled Jewish communities, setting people against one another as they respond in different ways.

But right at the end of the chapter, we find today's verses. They tell of the people who hear the Gospel message and find in it a ring of truth, or at least are prepared to give it the benefit of the doubt. They accept the disciples as "prophets", those who speak the word of the Lord, who tell the truth about God and his people. They invite them in and give them water to refresh them after their journey.

The result, says Jesus, is that receiving the messengers they also receive the one who sent them. A new community is formed. This new community consists only of those who accept the message of the Gospel and those who preach it. This is the community of the Kingdom of heaven and God is there. It's a prophetic community. It stands in the tradition of the prophets of old, who not only proclaimed the word of the Lord in judgement and blessing, but

urged the people to live lives of deep faith of justice and generosity. So in the new community the thirsty are given water to drink. The spiritual bond results in practical care.

For Jesus and those who wrote his story, the main danger for the followers of the new faith was opposition from outside. They knew that the Christian message was controversial. It challenged cherished beliefs. It broke families apart. The divisions were heightened by persecution when choices became very clear-cut.

For us the situation is different. The decision of one family member to be baptised or confirmed and go to church (when we can!) is regarded on the whole with indifference. For us the danger is within the Christian community itself. It is easy for Church people to forget that they are members of a prophetic community gathered in the presence of Christ, united by their acceptance of the message of the Gospel. It is easy for charity to be forgotten, with backs turned on those with whom we disagree rather than cups of water held out to them.

The community of the followers of Jesus is a precious thing. In it we find new sisters and brothers. In it we enjoy the presence of God. Strengthened by it, we are able to create other communities which God's children can be loved and cared for. It can attract others to want to know more about God. At its best it is prophetic, proclaiming the message for salvation and working for justice for the weakest in society. Then we can know that we truly belong in the Kingdom of Heaven.

Amen