

Quenching a Thirst**COMMUNION**

Part 2B – July 2, 2023

Genesis 22:1-14

¹After these things God tested Abraham. He said to him, “Abraham!” And he said, “Here I am.” ²He said, “Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains that I shall show you.” ³So Abraham rose early in the morning, saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him, and his son Isaac; he cut the wood for the burnt offering, and set out and went to the place in the distance that God had shown him. ⁴On the third day Abraham looked up and saw the place far away. ⁵Then Abraham said to his young men, “Stay here with the donkey; the boy and I will go over there; we will worship, and then we will come back to you.” ⁶Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering and laid it on his son Isaac, and he himself carried the fire and the knife. So the two of them walked on together. ⁷Isaac said to his father Abraham, “Father!” And he said, “Here I am, my son.” He said, “The fire and the wood are here, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?” ⁸Abraham said, “God himself will provide the lamb for a burnt offering, my son.” So the two of them walked on together.

⁹When they came to the place that God had shown him, Abraham built an altar there and laid the wood in order. He bound his son Isaac, and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. ¹⁰Then Abraham reached out his hand and took the knife to kill his son. ¹¹But the angel of the LORD called to him from heaven, and said, “Abraham, Abraham!” And he said, “Here I am.” ¹²He said, “Do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him; for now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me.”

¹³ And Abraham looked up and saw a ram, caught in a thicket by its horns. Abraham went and took the ram and offered it up as a burnt offering instead of his son. ¹⁴ So Abraham called that place “The LORD will provide”; as it is said to this day, “On the mount of the LORD it shall be provided.”

Matthew 10:40-42

⁴⁰ “Whoever welcomes you welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me. ⁴¹ Whoever welcomes a prophet in the name of a prophet will receive a prophet’s reward; and whoever welcomes a righteous person in the name of a righteous person will receive the reward of the righteous; ⁴² and whoever gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones in the name of a disciple — truly I tell you, none of these will lose their reward.”



Many people today have a thirst. For some it is for meaning and purpose. For some it is for wealth, popularity, success or status. For some it is to fill that hole in their hearts. These

same thirsts have existed since the beginning of time. Today we will talk about quenching people’s thirst – their thirst for Jesus and for God. Now, for Jesus, thirsts were quenched through relationships. These relationships began rooted in welcome and hospitality. These two components remain essential to our discipleship, just as they were to Jesus and his ministry. Today we will consider both how we offer and how we receive hospitality and welcome. So, in a way, we will wrestle with grace. Today we are called to pay attention to how we welcome, how we include, and how we help others to feel a part of who we are and what we do.

While hospitality and welcome are outward-focused, they are not exclusive to guests and visitors that walk through our doors. These essentials of our faith apply to those we encounter in the world, to those who we may meet through a new fresh expression of faith, to those who live around us. So a big question for today is this: How wide is our definition of family? And perhaps the bigger question: How wide is the circle that we cast as we seek to draw others into the family and kingdom of God?

My friends, at their core, everyone is thirsty. And we are in the thirst-quenching business. As John Wesley said, “The world is our parish.” The world begins in our sanctuary and in our fellowship hall for sure. And then the world opens to us as we walk out the front door. As we prepare to discern our call to quench thirsts and to be welcoming and hospitable, let us begin with a word of prayer...

Turn with me to Matthew 10, starting in verse 40 as we begin this time together. As we do so, let us remember where we left off last week. This is one of the beautiful things about faithful and consistent Bible study and worship. We are blessed to see the connections that are found running throughout the Bible and throughout each book of the Bible. Last Sunday we read about the cost of discipleship – of shouting from the rooftops and hearing whispers in our ears, of not peace but a sword that could even divide families, of sparrows and God’s care for you and me, and of the call to pick up our cross as we seek to walk in Jesus’ footsteps. These three verses today from Matthew’s gospel are the conclusion of that speech preparing the disciples to go out into the world to preach the good news and to heal and bring wholeness. This will be their first mission trip.

Instead of insulating windows on Pine Ridge for the upcoming winter or serving a meal on the street in Rapid City to those experiencing homelessness, the disciples are sent to go door to door, community to community, asking to talk about Jesus. He begins with a divine proclamation: *“Whoever welcomes you welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me.”*

He wants the disciples to understand that they go not only in his name, but also in the name of God. If the disciples are

welcomed, Jesus himself is welcomed and, in turn, God is welcomed. Have you ever looked at sharing the good news in this light? It is powerful to carry this with us as we seek to disciple others. Put another way, when we go in his name, God goes with us.

*“Whoever welcomes you
welcomes me, and
whoever welcomes me
welcomes the one
who sent me.”*

- Matthew 10:40



I think we often want to place the burden of welcome or of receiving the good news on the other. You know – I’m here with this great thing to offer you, so you should bow down and graciously receive. But what if the burden is NOT on the one who must welcome you are you go to share the good news? What if the burden is on us as we go into the world? Jesus is not telling the disciples or us to just knock quietly on the door and to rush off to the next house before someone comes, hurrying to the next house to do the same thing again. He is not inviting us to offer some half-hearted attempt to invite someone to church with a built-in excuse not to come – ‘You are really busy and it’s a long drive, so you probably don’t want to come to church with me, do you?’ That is NOT what Jesus has in mind.

No, Jesus is calling us to be bold and encouraging in our invitation, in our conversation, and in how we seek to be Christ in the world. Jesus calls us, as we said last week, to shout it from the rooftops, to live our love out loud, to be love as a verb.

Many folks, maybe even some of you, like to think that this is for the professionals. The task of sharing Christ with the world is the job of the pastor, the missionary, the true evangelists. It is their job, yes. But is not just their job. That is why Jesus goes on to itemize the task in the passage. Jesus tells all disciples – those present and us today – that whoever welcomes a prophet or welcomes a righteous person or who gives a cup of cold water to even a little child will receive a reward. Part of what Jesus is getting at here is the fact that it is all of our jobs to share the good news of Jesus Christ with the world.

It is the charge of everyone to be witnesses of the good news. It is the task of brand-new Christians and it is the task of seasoned saints. It is the task of the ‘professionals’ and it is the task of those engage for just one hour on a Sunday morning. We are all to be the means by which the lost encounter the good shepherd. We are all to be the means by which the stranger finds welcome and community. We are all to be the means by which the hurting and the broken meet the great physician. We are all to be the means by which those outside the family of God are invited into the family of God. We are all called to be the face and hands of Jesus to the stranger, to our neighbor, to our family, and to everyone else that we meet. The lost, the lonely, the hurting, the broken, those outside the community of faith – they all have a thirst that only Jesus can quench. It is our task to be thirst-quenchers. This charge is not easy. It takes a solid faith and trust in the Lord to truly seek to be Christ to the world.



There are typically two responses to this charge to be Christ to the world. One is to become a bearer of cold water. In doing so we offer the welcome and hospitality that is so essential to the faith, taking both as seriously as Jesus did. The second response is to receive hospitality as Jesus tells us to – with humility and with gratitude. We must therefore ask ourselves: How do we accept the cups of cold water that are given to us? How do we receive the nourishment of the spirit and soul that is offered to us by God as we read and meditate upon the word, as we worship in community, and as we gather with one another in study and fellowship? We are to receive from God and others with gratitude and humility. So this too is a question to consider: Can Christ be seen in our gratitude as well as in our generosity of heart and spirit? Jesus did say, *“Whoever welcomes you welcomes me.”*

Hospitality and gratitude both require obedience. It requires obedience to God, especially when the task it is hard. Like with Hagar and Sarah, like it is with that neighbor or co-worker, being obedient to our call to be welcoming and hospitable and grateful can be so challenging. Turn with me now to Genesis 22 as we look at an example of deep, deep faith and trust in God and at a profound example of obedience and humility in the face of a very difficult situation.

As I read through the lectionary readings for this week early Monday morning, out at Dutchman Campground site #25, and thought about this week’s message and themes, God blessed me with some really cool insights. Through reading chapter 22 I came to see chapter 21, last week’s reading on Abraham casting out Hagar and Ishmael and of God’s provision for them, in such a different light.

What was so challenging and difficult and hard to read and consider last week took on a new and powerful meaning in light of this week's Old Testament text.

In verse 1 we read that God is testing Abraham as he is asked to sacrifice Isaac. As I read that my mind went back to last week's reading. Wasn't God testing Abraham last week too

"Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains that I shall show you."

- Genesis 22:2



when he was asked to cast Hagar and Ishmael out into the wilderness? I cannot imagine what it would be like to hear these words: *"Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains that I shall show you."* Can you imagine hearing this from God? Take your only son, the one you had at 100 years of age, the one that God promised as the son who would be the foundation of the great nation and pour out his life on the altar as a way to quench the thirst of your God. Can you imagine?

And Abraham is obedient to God. In verses 3-5 he rises early in the morning, saddles his donkey, sets out with Isaac and two servants and the wood and fire and knife, and heads towards the place that God told him to go. Again, I ask: can you imagine? Three days into the journey it comes to the point for Abraham to leave the donkey and servants behind and to continue with Isaac. Abraham carries the fire and the knife, Isaac carries the wood. As they are departing, Abraham says this to the servants: *"Stay here with the donkey; the boy and I will go over there; we will worship, and then we will come back to you."* Can you image this scene, this commitment to God?

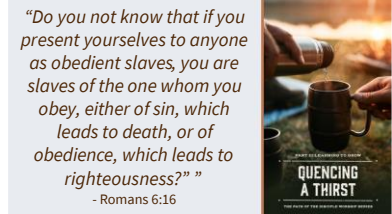
"Stay here with the donkey; the boy and I will go over there; we will worship, and then we will come back to you."

- Genesis 22:5b



"We will worship, and we will come back to you." What trust and faith.

Abraham is asked to sacrifice the son who has been promised as his lineage. Paul writes of this in our Romans 6 passage for this week. In verse 16 he writes, *“Do you not know that if you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness?”* Abraham is the living embodiment of this faith that Paul describes of obedience that leads to righteousness.



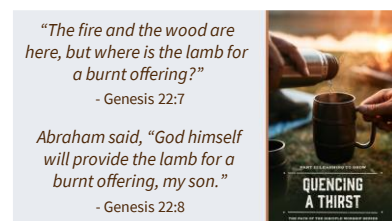
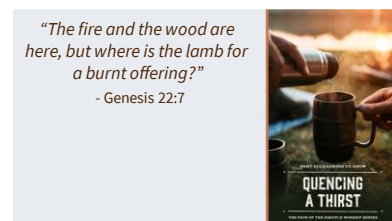
Abraham and Isaac continue on their journey. Isaac says to Abraham, *“The fire and the wood are here, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?”*

This is such a great question. Isaac is insightful and has been brought up in the faith. He reads the scene well. Just think what it would’ve been like to hear your son ask this question:

‘The fire and the wood are here, Dad, but where is the lamb?’

In response Abraham says, *“God himself will provide the lamb for a burnt offering, my son.”* Again, Abraham demonstrates

great trust and faith in God. My son, he says, God will provide. Abraham is inviting Isaac to the same place of trust and faith.



In verse 9 they arrive at the site for the sacrifice. In obedience and trust and faith, Abraham builds an altar, arranges the wood, binds and lays Isaac on the altar. He raises the knife to begin the sacrifice... and God intercedes. Last week, in Genesis 21:18 God intercedes, and an angel told Hagar to take Ishmael by the hand. In doing so, her eyes were opened, and she saw the well, God’s provision for her.

Today in verse 12 the angel of the Lord interrupts Abraham, saying, “*Do not lay a hand on the boy.*” Looking up, Abraham sees a ram stuck in the thicket. Again, God provides. If Abraham could come to the point of raising the knife with his only son, the question that comes to mind is this: Can we extend a hand, can we offer a cup of cold water, can we sit beside that neighbor or co-worker as a brother or sister in Christ, trusting that God will provide the words, the actions, the whatever is needed in that moment?



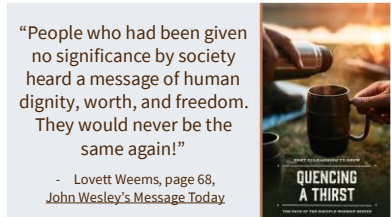
As we move towards a close, I turn to our Wesleyan Methodist heritage and roots to find an answer to the question of obedience, welcome, hospitality, and humility in our task to quench a thirst, in our calling to be Christ to the world. Welcome and hospitality, obedience and humility, these are some of the marks of a Methodist. In just a moment we will visit these in the sacrament of communion.

On page 25 in Recapturing the Wesleys' Vision, author Paul Chilcote writes this about the Wesley brothers and about the early Methodists: “One of the most distinctive characteristics of Wesleyan Christianity is their emphasis upon the connection between faith and works. To put it simply, if your faith as a Christian is genuine, then other people will be able to see it lived out in loving ways. Faith in Jesus Christ is not real until it is connected to how you live day to day. This is what living faith is all about.” Rooted in Christ, practicing a genuine faith, we will connect to the lost, the lonely, the hurting, the broken, those outside the community of faith – offering a cup of cold water for that thirst that only Jesus can quench.

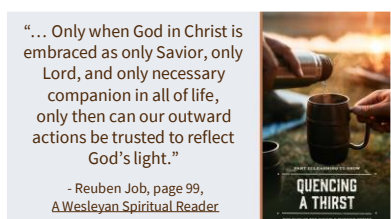
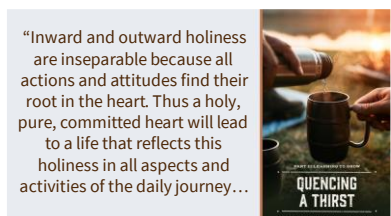
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Lovett Weems connects to this call to living faith in John Wesley's Message Today. On page 68 he notes that the ultimate outcome of the original Wesleyan revival was that "People who had been given no significance by society heard a message of human dignity, worth, and freedom. They would never be the same again!" Those who were ignored or worse by society and by the Anglican church – the lost, lonely, hurting, broken, outcast – those who were without dignity, heard a message of love and welcome, of hope and worth, of dignity and freedom, all found in Jesus Christ. Along these lines, Wesleyan scholar Albert Outler also notes, "His movement provided thousands of faceless men and women with new experiences of personal dignity conferred on them by God" (page 64, John Wesley's Message Today). Who are the faceless men and women in our society, in our nation, in our communities, and in our neighborhoods? Who are they that need a drink of the living water, who need an encounter with our living hope?



This connection between faith and works, between having a living faith that was both personal and public, this was at the heart of John and Charles Wesley's understanding of personal and social holiness. It is what moves us all from having a personal faith to living out a public faith. For the Wesley brothers, "Inward and outward holiness are inseparable because all actions and attitudes find their root in the heart. Thus a holy, pure, committed heart will lead to a life that reflects this holiness in all aspects and activities of the daily journey... Only when God in Christ is embraced as only Savior, only Lord, and only necessary companion in all of life, only then can our outward



actions be trusted to reflect God's light" (Reuben Job, A Wesleyan Spiritual Reader, page 99).

This is what we saw in our Genesis passage. Although Abraham lived out this holiness long before John Wesley taught about it, in Abraham's example we can see how holiness of heart reflects God's light. We can see how a holy, pure, and committed heart can reveal the power of an obedient and faithful walk with God.

In our gospel text, Jesus sends out the 12, sending them to the lost sheep of Israel, to those in need of a shepherd. We remember from the Psalms that our good shepherd leads us besides still waters as he seeks to restore our soul. As the people of God, sent out into the world to quench the thirst that only Jesus can quench, may we too be faithful and trusting, obedient and true to the God who provides, to the God who sees and cares. May it be so for you and for me. Alleluia and amen.



GPS – Grow, Pray, Study

- 1) *Grow*. As you reflect on Jesus' sending the disciples out to knock on doors and to ask if it would be alright to talk about Jesus, whose door might you knock on?
- 2) *Pray*. Who might the Spirit be calling you to offer a cup of cold water? Or... who might be seeking to offer you a cup? Pray for your heart to be opened.
- 3) *Study*. Read Matthew 11:1-6. How are these words of Jesus further instruction to his disciples? How can we, as disciples, be a part of quenching these thirsts?