

Sermon 26th June 2011 Linda Anchell
Pentecost 2 Genesis 22:1-14
St Philip's O'Connor
Akedah and Refugee week and story....

read Genesis 22:9

When 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.

[*followed by...*]

"And after that she [Sarah] never spoke to him again. She lived at Kiriath-arba, at Hebron, and he [Abraham] dwelt in Beer-Sheba. It was not that she could not forgive him, or even that she could not forgive herself. It was that she had nothing to say to a man who believed that God had blessed him for being willing to kill her child."

[Sara Maitland: Angel and Me p35]

Sara Maitland here is doing a very Jewish thing, a re telling of an ancient story and finding in it details and emotions that are deeper than the surface story. And yet, if these emotions are not aroused by the hearing of stories such as today's Abraham story, we have not heard them.

Avivah Zornberg says if we hear this story of the binding of Isaac and do not have sleepless nights over it, we have not heard it.

Abraham was a man who heard God, a man who listened to god and shaped his life according to what he heard. You might call him a righteous person, one who followed the Lord.

Abraham's story starts in Chapter 12 of Genesis. (a bit before if you want the genealogy)

12 The Lord said to Abram, "Go forth from your native land and from your father's house to the land that I will show you.

"I will make of you a great nation,
And I will bless you;
I will make your name great,
And you shall be a blessing.
I will bless those who bless you
And curse him that curses you;
And all the families of the earth
Shall bless themselves by you."

Abram went forth....
and he journeyed...

a wandering Aramaean was my father...

He had come from Ur, and gone to Haran with his father. Now he journeyed on.

There is a story here, a long one, I would tell it, but

...he journeyed on

....through Canaan,a famine sends them to Egypt, back again to the land he will possess. ... in chapter 15 God establishes a covenant with Abraham in a strange and compelling ritual... but that is another sermon, another story.

then the story of Hagar, Sarah's maid. An opportunity to have a child, and a boy, Ishmael is born to Hagar. But Sarah sends them away into the wilderness.

Sarah is childless. When three strangers appear by the terebinths of Mamre, and prophesy that she will have a child, Sarah laughs. But, Sarah bore a child to Abraham in his old age, the boy Isaac.

then

"Sometime afterward, God put Abraham to the test.
He said to him, 'Take your son, Isaac whom you love, and **go**...
and offer him there as a burnt offering..."

Did you notice that: "The Lord said", "God said"

when Isaac is bound and on the wood, an Angel of the Lord called to Abraham.

God never again spoke to him directly.

But the angel said to him to look up, or "look behind"... (an alternative reading which the writers of the midrash use well!)

look behind you,

Abraham, turn around,
remember

where have you been?
who are you?

turn around
(we might say "repent")

tell your story again, tell it to yourself
know who/what you are

and he turned as saw the ram caught in the thicket,
and he unbound his son.

Abraham's story is one of travelling, of wandering.

We tell stories of our travels and revel in what we learn of our world and of ourselves.

But not every travelling story is a "light" one. Many are about dispossession, of being pushed out, sent away, fleeing from danger and persecution. This week we have been privileged to hear many stories from refugees as refugee week focuses on newcomers to this land. It is a privilege to hear these stories but it can be intrusive to require stories to be told.

Be hospitable as you hear and generous as you tell them.

Our stories need to be told and re told.

They gain strength in the telling of them.

like wrapping or winding a rope.

We need to tell our own stories so that we get a deeper understanding of our ourselves, or our world and of our god.

We need to listen to others, and draw out their stories ---

to hear them and help them speak.

Telling of story builds relationships, builds community

Hear the stories from this place
from each other...

Trish who would dance whenever we sang "Lord of the Dance";
(we remembered her last week as it was the tenth anniversary of her death.)

Irenaeus who wrote "The Glory of God is a person fully alive" Do you know him? he died about 200AD. remember him, remember his words. Live your life.

As we tell and reflect on our lives, on our stories, we might be saying "How long O Lord, will you forget me, forever?"

Many stories do have that sense. At 10 o'clock service we will hear the gospel hymn "fly away." Slavery brings dreadful stories but very special music as that story is told.

[Some glad morning when this life is over
I'll fly away
To a home on God's celestial shore
I'll fly away

Chorus
I'll fly away, O glory, I'll fly away
When I die, hallelujah by and by,
O I'll fly away]

We will be standing soon and saying the words of the Nicene Creed.

They are not a story

but they come out of the biblical stories from Abraham on...

We will together proclaim a creed,

then together we pray

and then we hear the story as come to communion.

Listen to, hear, read, and tell the stories that come from this place, from our liturgy our tradition.

May we see with renewed eyes

hear with renewed ears

and proclaim with renewed tongues....

footnotes. some mentioned in preaching, others here for extra information.

[This story of the binding of Isaac is known as "The Akedah". It has been told and retold for many thousands of years. Jewish tradition has a very rich tradition...