

WHAT KIND OF FATHER WOULD DO THAT?
Sermon Series: "The Offence of the Cross"
February 18, 2018 Romans 5: 6-11 First Sunday Lent
The Church of the Covenant

We may be familiar with the story in the Old Testament where Abraham takes his only son, Isaac, because God has commanded him to do so, and prepares him to be sacrificed on an altar. (Genesis 22: 13) At the last second God intervenes and provides Himself a male ram for the sacrifice and Isaac is saved. But how could Abraham have so calmly prepared the wood and prepared the sacrifice when the sacrifice was his only son? What kind of father would do that? When you think about it, it is the same question we might ask the Almighty as He prepares His only begotten son, Jesus Christ, for the sacrifice of the cross during Lent.

I remember when I was young my Dad took our little Dauschaund, Cleopatra Von Dochshur Broberg, whose name was longer than she was, on a walk. For whatever reason Dad had disciplined me and I had to stay in the house that day. Well, little Stu-be-doo thought it would be an excellent idea to lock Dad out of the house. O, was that a mistake. Dad was fuming on the front porch with Cleo at his side. He'd say in the sweetest tones he could muster, with a certain sinister edge to them nevertheless—"O, Stuart, just open the door and everything will be just fine." So I opened the small side door of the garage, and Dad burst through the door filled with righteous anger, and with little Cleo getting her leash wrapped around Dad's legs, and screaming at the top of her lungs, KAI-AI-AI-AI!!!!. Tripping Dad momentarily and saving the son. I think if the Lord had come to Dad in that instant and said, "Take your son and place him on an altar of sacrifice" he might have been persuaded to do it. Not really. Not my Dad.

The sermon title comes from a discussion I had with a man many years ago in a former church who asked me the question—"What Kind of Father would do That?" What kind of God would ask Abraham to place his son on an altar of sacrifice? What kind of God would ask His only begotten Son, Jesus, to go to a cross and suffer a horrible death? He couldn't believe in that kind of God, he told me. He couldn't imagine taking his only son and doing that, no matter the urging or circumstance. The man was a lawyer and I wasn't going to be able to out-argue him. But as Christians who have heard the story of Jesus our whole lives and who with a sort of blaa-ze and cavalier attitude go—"Well sure; God asks Jesus His Son to go to a cross and to die for me; how nice; good for me; I'm glad God made that sacrifice of His only Son for me." But we skip over blithely the offense of the cross. The Bible calls it a "stumbling block" (Galatians 5: 1 & Romans 9: 33). People can't get their heads around why Jesus had to die. Only His blood can atone for our sins—why does there have to be any shedding of blood to forgive sins? A good man dies for sinful creatures—where's the justice in that? The cross is ugly and brutal, a grotesque image of violence from which we want to turn away—what kind of loving God would ask His precious and beloved Son to do that? We've heard the story so often that we don't grasp what a stumbling block and what an offense the cross truly is...

You know, and I tried to explain to the lawyer that the story of Abraham and Isaac really is a story where God is saying YOU DON'T HAVE TO SACRIFICE YOUR CHILDREN TO ME. "I am unlike

these other heathen, philistine and Caananite deities who require child sacrifice.” I will provide the male ram for the sacrifice, says the Lord. I will provide the lamb who will go to the slaughter, the Lamb of God who taketh away the sins of the world. (I will not go into this BUT, TODAY the heathen, fallen secular gods of this fallen God-rejecting secular world still require CHILD SACRIFICE. Just think about it. But the Lord God Almighty does not. His burden is light; the world’s gods burdens are heavy.) But the lawyer was unpersuaded. Because it was still offensive to him that God asked Jesus to go to the cross...What kind of Father would do that?

We will generally be studying around the 5th chapter of the book of Romans throughout Lent. Romans 5:6 says: *“While we were yet helpless at the right time Christ died for the ungodly.”* (Romans 5:5) God took pity on us. We are helpless. We’ve tried to figure this out on our own and cannot. We’ve tried to save ourselves by our own good works but we cannot. We’ve tried to work ourselves up to the holiness and righteousness of God on our own and fail every time. We’ve tried to do it our way, and have discovered we can only do it God’s way. We want to craft our own stairway to heaven –take a little dab of this piece of the Bible, reject that piece of the Bible, add this little syncretistic piece from some Eastern Religion, believe what Facebook tells us and what the majority will Tweet and like, and through all of our efforts we are still helpless, lost in our own sins, unreconciled to God. While we were yet helpless, while we were yet sinners, while we were far away from the love and grace of God, nevertheless God took mercy on us and sent His only begotten Son to die for us. God did for us what we cannot do for ourselves. Save ourselves. Only God can do that. Only God can make that sacrifice on our behalf. That’s why its so offensive. We want to be in control; and we are not in control. WHILE WE WERE YET HELPLESS...HE DID THIS FOR US...

And His only begotten Son Jesus is the most precious thing to the Father. God’s love is passionate, eternal, unimaginable, high surging, deeper than any ocean, higher than Everest, powerful, a little scary, infinite, once it grabs you it will never let you go. That love is the love with which God loves Jesus. The Father loves the Son, powerfully, unconditionally, without reserve, wholly and perfect and complete. So how could this heavenly Father who loves Jesus with such passion, how could He ask Jesus to go to the cross? What kind of Father...?

You know, I have been turning over and over in my mind my answer to that lawyer who asked me that question more than 20 years ago. And I’m pretty good with words. But I am struck dumb in the face of the cross. I can only say the words to John 3: 16: *“For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.”* (John 3: 16) Lawyer, God so loved the world, and God has so loved you, that while you were helpless, at just the right time in your life, that HE was willing to sacrifice the very thing He loved most for you. My only answer to the lawyer is –that’s how much God loves you. That’s the kind of Father who would do that for YOU! **Would you choose NOT to be offended, but to BELIEVE IN JESUS today?** Amen and Amen.

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IF THIS HAS BLESSED YOU, PLEASE PASS IT ALONG TO A FRIEND!*