Everyone has experienced a lot of loss over the past several weeks. We have lost the ability to get together with other people. We have lost the idea that we can go to the store and buy what we want. We have all lost the sense of security that we ordinarily have that our environment is essentially fairly safe and not potentially life-threatening. We have lost school being in session; students cannot graduate; proms cannot be held; weddings postponed; funerals without a proper service. There is much loss around us. We may even know of people who have lost their lives. And we also all know of people who have lost their jobs. If you have been experiencing this period of time as loss, then this sermon is a sermon for you!

Several years ago I was serving another church that was going through a lot of loss. It had for years and years run a substantial deficit and we felt called to cut some $650,000 out of its operating budget. So downsizing was experienced as loss; it was emotional; there was grief attached to it. And we were supposed to participate in a major event and indeed were hosting it in our sanctuary and it entailed bringing in a major national figure to speak. And on this particular day I was sitting in the Pastor’s Study and received a letter from the organizing committee and it said that our portion of the costs were $2,500. And it threw me into despair and a panic. Lord, I just cannot go to the Trustees and ask them one more time for money, this is not budgeted, we are tightening our belts, how can I raise this money? And fortunately, instead of despair and worry, the thought crossed the mind of the Pastor to pray, instead of worry, ask God, and give it to God to provide. So I folded my hands on the desk and I prayed a very earnest prayer: “Lord, only you can provide. I can’t do it. I can’t go to the Trustees one more time. I don’t know where the money is going to come from. I know you want to see this event happen. But You must provide a way where there is no way. Lord, you must provide. In Jesus’ name. Amen.” And I felt a lot better about it but I still didn’t have the money. So the church secretary had brought in the mail and always placed it on the right front corner of my desk. And I leaned over and picked up the next letter on my desk and I opened it and a check fell out of it. The family was grateful I had baptized their granddaughter and had sent a check to be used for the “Pastor’s discretion”. And do you want to hazard a guess the amount of the check? Yes. It was precisely the amount needed --$2,500. The answer to all my worries and finally all my prayers was to be found right under my nose, sitting already on the corner of my desk. In the Hebrew the phrase is: JEHOVAH JIREH. It means: “The Lord provides.”

Forgetting the story of the Lord’s provision, I have been kvetching around about church finances of late. I was just sure that because the church wasn’t meeting for worship that pledge receipts would go way down. That people would cease to give their tithes and offerings to the Lord because the church was shut down. (Of course, I was forgetting that people do not give to the church; they give to the Lord and for the glory of the Lord Jesus. Silly Pastor, I had forgotten so many things in the midst of the CoronaVirus fears). I had forgotten
how the Lord always provides for His purposes. I had forgotten all the stories of the Lord’s provision in the past. I had forgotten how I serve a wonderful church filled with wonderfully faithful, extraordinarily generous people. I had forgotten that people give to the Lord and not to the church. And the Lord’s work continues even when the church is shut down. O me of little faith. Silly Pastor, thinking the Lord won’t provide...

So in short order, we discover that people have actually contributed more in the months of March and April this year than they did last year at this same time. More not less, which was my fear. Generous people contributed to purchase the new equipment we needed in order to broadcast our services over YouTube and Facebook. More provision not less. And would it shock you that the amount given perfectly matched the amount needed? The Lord Provides and when the Lord provides He provides PERFECTLY! The first Sunday we were closed and I was worrying about the pledges, as I am exiting the church a wonderful women is waiting for me in the parking lot and she hands me her check to make sure the church received it. A sign from God not to worry? You betcha! So here a couple of weeks ago I am on my cellphone talking to the Chair of Stewardship and I am still kvetching around about whether we may have enough money or not and while I am speaking to him a member of our congregation drives up my driveway and hands me two envelopes, one for his pledge and one for a special gift. OK, Lord. I hear you now. You clubbed me over the head now THREE TIMES with the same message. I finally hear You loud and clear. Why am I worrying? Why am I fearful? Why am I afraid You won’t provide? Lord, You are Jehovah-Jireh; You are the Lord who provides!!!!!! This is a message for someone worrying today...

Our scripture story is the familiar story of Abraham taking his only son, Isaac, to a place to sacrifice him to the Lord. Abraham believes he has been told by God to do this. So he is obedient. And in the culture of that day, the Philistines and the Canaanites, all the heathen cultures around him, engaged in child sacrifice. Children were placed in the arms of the graven image Molech and rolled into the fire. Children were killed to appease the god Baal, so that the god would provide a good harvest and material blessings. So Abraham probably thought that the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of Sarah and Rachel, was probably just the same. But Jehovah is a very different God than these other gods. Jehovah God is a god who abhors the taking of innocent blood. He is distinct from the heathen, horrible and horrendous gods which purport to be gods but are not gods. But Abraham nevertheless in faith takes Isaac to an altar. Isaac speaks to his Father in what is surely one of the most heart rending exchanges in all of scripture. He says, “My Father!” Abraham responds, “Here am I, my son.” Isaac then asks, “Look, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?” (Genesis 22: 7) And I think then, there is one of the greatest pauses in all of scripture. Both as Abraham endeavors to compose himself and thinks what he will say to his only son, there was also a great pause in heaven. And Abraham then says to Isaac: “My son, God will provide for Himself a lamb for the burnt offering.” (v. 8) Abraham says: “God will provide” and in the Hebrews this is Jehovah-Jireh. God will provide.
And as Abraham is about to sacrifice his only son, an angel of the Lord intervenes, and Abraham sees a male lamb, a ram caught in the thicket, and sacrifices this male lamb, rather than Isaac, his son. And as verse 14 states: “And Abraham called the name of the place, “The Lord will provide”. He called the place Jehovah-Jireh, the Lord will provide. He marked this place as a reminder to him and to all who follow him that indeed the Lord provides; when we don’t see a way how the Lord will provide, the Lord will make a way where there seems to be no way; when it feels impossible for us, it is not impossible to God; when it feels overwhelming or too difficult –“What is too difficult for me? Sayeth the Lord.”

As I sit too quietly at home consumed by my thoughts, uninterrupted by the cacophony and meaningless noise of the modern world, unbusied now, but normally too hurried to stop and pray to the Lord, I am also beset by other losses; I think too much of my dear parents who are gone to be with the Lord. I think how much I wish they could be with me and how I miss speaking with them. See, for human beings one loss pushes all of our loss buttons. The loss going on in our world right now pushes other buttons of loss and grief in our hearts. It is true. It is so very true.

But there is another male lamb whom the Lord has provided. This is the lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. This is the perfect lamb without blemish who was sacrificed by being nailed to a cross at Calvary. This is the only begotten son of God, paralleling Isaac as the only son of Abraham, whom indeed God sacrificed for us and for our salvation. To provide for us in spiritual matters. To provide for us a hope that is eternal and set for us in heaven. To provide for us a day when we shall see our loved ones again, in a better place and upon a brighter shore and for all eternity. To provide the ONE THING, the one person, who is most needful in our lives –this wonderful Lord and Savior, who has given His life that we might live. Foreshadowed by the story of Abraham and Isaac and the sacrifice of an only son.

So the place of perfect provision begins with the full acceptance of the Son of God as Lord and as Savior of our life. What sacrifice He has made we receive and believe. We first take the Lord’s perfect provision in His Son Jesus Christ. We start there. We remember the story again of God’s perfect provision. We remember those places in our past where indeed the Lord is Jehovah-Jireh, the Lord who provides. And if He has provided in the past, and if He has provided perfectly in the past, and IF He will not even withhold from us His only begotten Son, Jesus Christ, then why can we not believe He will provide perfectly for us today? Whatever our loss. Whatever our grief. Whatever our lack and absence. Will He not provide yet again???. JEHOVAH JIREH. The Lord Provides! Receive it. Believe it. Live it. Expect it. Today! Amen and Amen.

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