

I am going to preach on the First Reading from Genesis about Abraham and Isaac, and not on the Gospel this morning, because as a mother I feel an obligation to acknowledge the listening of our children who heard its reading. This passage is what the feminists coined a 'text of terror': those Biblical texts that denigrated women, or described women in a bad light. Because this text describes a major patriarch's intent to kill his only and beloved son, it can be a 'text of terror' for children, and I feel for this reason that it needs to be talked about.

Now my message for the children about Abraham's intent on killing his son Isaac is that I disagree with this passage. It doesn't matter to me that God told him to do it as a test of Abraham's faith in God. If I understand the text as it is written, I don't agree with God. I think it was wrong of God to ask Abraham to kill his son to prove Abraham's love for God. If I were Abraham, I would have told God to find another way to test me because I'm not going to kill my son to prove my love for you. My decision would probably cost me major points at the pearly gates, but I am not prepared to kill my child to prove my love for God.

Now, if I look at this passage from another angle, that is from that of the storytellers and writers of this it, I disagree with their seeming to be 'okay' with Abraham killing Isaac. Biblical scholars inform from a social perspective that child sacrifice was the norm in the ancient Canaanite culture in which the Israelites lived. And, we know from the Moses saga that God killed the first-born in Egypt, and offered protection from this genocide to the Israelites, thus, the Passover came into being, but I push against the whole notion of killing babies and children regardless of how dire the situation. Sacrificing children, to me, is not a show of faithfulness. And, we shouldn't sweep this messy text under the carpet, writing it off to its cultural context i.e., it happened long ago, because the legitimacy of Isaac's sacrifice was brought forward, not only into the Christian interpretation of the sacrificed Isaac as a precursor for the crucified Jesus, but as a paradigm of our faith. I'm aiming at us adults now.

I don't think we should accept sacrificing our children as a paradigm of faith, not just because I personally

disagree with it, but because of the way it has played out in our culture. Let us shine a light on the sacrifice of children's happiness in bad marriages, the sacrifice of them in situations where they are repeatedly exposed to domestic violence, are victims of crime in poor neighborhoods and rich suburban schools, not to mention the current horrific statistics of children trafficked in this country. I need not go on because I think you get my point.

But, what I, also, think is primary for us to understand is that we can disagree with the Scriptures, even those with major figures like Abraham, and with major statements of faith, and not be zapped by God for disagreeing.

God wants us to understand God. That's why God sent Jesus to be among us. And I don't think God minds if we disagree what was written about God. I think we are selling short our relationship with God if we allow ourselves to sit silently through Scripture that goes against our very beings. You don't have to agree with how I feel about a text; and, it's fine with me, also, if you agree with it. We are both reading the text to form a closer relationship with God through a better understanding of our faith in God. Abraham's understanding of his faith was certainly different than mine, but we both have faith in God. It is important that we feel free to wrestle with difficult texts that don't seem to have been a good idea regardless of the era or culture. I choose not to perpetuate the paradigm that sacrificing children is a viable option of proving one's faith or living one's life; but I, also, recognize that disagreeing with the Bible and with an accepted tenet of faith, like God's test of Abraham, is not easy for some of us to do. As scholar Carol Delaney puts it, going against a Biblical text like this is like 'threatening the foundation of a house because it unsettles the edifice built on it'. (Delaney. *Abraham on Trial: The Social Legacy of a Biblical Myth*. Princeton University Press. 2000. 12.) I am willing to unsettle my house because the well-being of children is at stake.

But, being unsettled allows me to enter into a conversation with God that washing over the text

precludes. If I just sit with a de facto acceptance of my disagreement, I become stagnant in my relationship with God because I've given up on understanding God about our disagreement. But, if I wrestle with God about my disagreement, I have to work out with God how I feel about what was written, and the point God was trying to make that I don't get. Some scholars think that the writers of this text were speaking against child sacrifice by scaring ancient people with this story. Or, that this story was the legitimization of animal sacrifice to ward off God's anger. (*Revised Common Lectionary: Clippings*.

<http://montreal.anglican.org/comments/archive/apr13l.shtml>. 28 June 2014) But I don't buy even talking about putting children in harm's way as a prescriptive to pleasing God, so I've got to come at this from another perspective. Questioning the text makes me dig deeper in myself to find answers to questions I have asked of God. 'Why did people think this was okay? Look at the legacy of child abuse we're left with. What can I do to change this legacy?' See? Now, I am forming a new relationship with God through a new understanding based on having questioned what was written about God.

And this is the point of reading Scripture with reason, one of the tenets of our Episcopal belief: to come into a closer relationship with God through new and fresh understandings of who God is in our lives. The text today may never make sense to me, but I have a better understanding of why and what my relationship is with God because of it. Further, I don't want to rely on my own understanding: I want to share it with you, engage in conversation with you about your understanding of the text so that I might hear something else about it that will expand my understanding of it, and deepen my relationship with God. This is what goes on in Adult Bible Studies every Sunday in churches around the world: a sharing of understanding of God through different interpretations of the text. If you agree with God in this reading of Genesis, imagine how lively our discussion will be; but, also, imagine how much closer to God you can become through trying to understand God better in conversation with others who are, also, trying to do the same thing. Amen.