

Genesis 22:1-14
“The ram in the thicket”
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Movement 1 Our genetics binds us

Can you imagine what it feels like to be bound, placed on an altar, a fire to ignite the wood under you, and a knife raised over your heart? Some of us feel that way today. Some of us feel bound like Isaac.

Sigmund Freud says we are bound by the things which influence us, nature and nurture. Our genetics, and our culture. Genetics which in most of us, through natural selection, has bred into us narcissism, competitiveness, arrogance, and hubris. We are born narcissistic. We believe we are the center of our universe. We cry, and we are fed. We cry, and someone changes our diaper. We cry, and someone rocks us to sleep. This is what we do with our babies. But at some point, when our children are older, we teach our children they are not the center of their universe. To the extent that we do this determines whether they are still bound by their narcissism when they are adults.

But we are also born to be competitive, to be arrogant, and to hubris. The competitiveness and hubris which propels us to trample other people, Trample them when they are in our way. Trample them to get what we want. Trample others without any remorse. Arrogance which keeps us from listening to and learning from other people. Arrogance which causes us to cherry pick the Bible to support our opinions. Without looking at the message in the whole context. Arrogance which keeps us from looking at the Old Testament through the lens of the Good News. Through the lens of the Gospels.

We are genetically bound and imprisoned by our narcissism, competitiveness, arrogance, and hubris. We are bound like Isaac. We need to be freed from our genetic bindings. But we also need to be freed from our cultural bindings.

Movement 2 Our culture binds us

Our culture, and we, imprison others. Like Abraham, our culture, and we, bind Isaac. Our violent, minority devaluing, xenophobic culture. A culture we adopt most quickly from television, newspapers, political rhetoric, and our friends. When we do not use scriptural and prayerful discrimination, we are like amoebas. We ingest our environment, and we become our environment. We ingest violence, devaluation of women and minorities, and xenophobia, and we become violence promoting, misogynists, racists, and we become fearful of people who do not look like us. We cherry pick the Bible and say that Jesus tells us, “the poor will always be with us.” Without realizing that Jesus was saying put God first, not yourself, when you feed the poor. Because feeding the poor is not about you. It is about God. We misunderstand the Bible when we quote Proverbs, saying, “Spare the rod and spoil the child.” Because there are other rods besides corporal

punishment. Rods that do not promote violence. There are time outs for young children. There is restricting the use of cell phones and television for older children. And restricting the use of the car keys for teenagers. There are other rods besides corporal punishment. Corporal punishment which binds our children into thinking that violence is the way to reconcile differences and to teach lessons. Corporal punishment which is usually delivered when the parent is at least subliminally angry.

There was a movie a few years ago, "The Day After." In this movie, because of global warming, holes developed in the ozone, allowing the absolute 0 degrees Kelvin of outer space to reach the surface of the earth, flash freezing everything alive. The scientists got together and decided everyone north of the Mason Dixon line was going to die, and there was not time to mobilize them in the next few hours. Everyone south of the Mason Dixon line had time to go to Mexico for salvation from the instant Ice Age. As the hordes of Americans started crossing the border, something very poetic happened. Mexico closed its borders and built a fence keeping the Americans out!!! They did not think they could accommodate the need of the Americans to be fed and housed. That they would take away food and housing and jobs that rightfully belonged to the Mexicans!!!

Both the Old and New Testament echo over and over again we are to welcome and embrace the strangers among us. But we are influenced by both Democrats and Republicans who tell us our economy will be destroyed by the Guatemalans and Mexicans who cross the border. We are influenced like the amoeba who ingests its environment without discrimination. We become xenophobic, fearful of strangers. But if we look to scripture and prayer, we will find release from our bindings.

Movement 3 God's love releases us

You have heard me say before that I think Sigmund Freud is wrong. Because of his rejection of God, he could see no influence on human kind but nature and nurture. But we Christians here today know of a third influence, don't we?

We know the genius atheist Sigmund Freud himself was bound by his culturally induced hatred of what he perceived was an indifferent God. A God he thinks stands on the side lines without intervention while innocent people suffer. He probably had a synagogue teacher who told him at age 10 that those two common themes, God is all powerful and God is all loving, are not compatible with each other. But you and I know that God's power is not in the hand that rips through the fabric of space and time to choose which team in a football game will win. Not in the hand that rips through the fabric of space and time to cure cancer. No. We Christians know that God's power is found instead in his love by providing the ram in the thicket.

That God's power is found in his love expressed by this church in your support of the nursing home sing a long this afternoon at 3:30. Your support of the spouse grief support group which meets here on Tuesday mornings. Your support of the Bible study at the retirement center on Thursday afternoons. Your support of the soup kitchen the third Wednesday of each month. And your support of Stella and Charlotte when they go on a

missionary trip to Guatemala in November. And God's love is found in your support of Kathy during her father's illness.

God's love that releases us from shame in our own eyes into worthiness in God's. That releases us from fear into generosity. A love that releases us from isolation into community. That despite our genetically and culturally bound guilt in perpetuating brokenness, the resurrection of Jesus by God shows us no one is beyond the freeing power of God's reconciliation and redemption. Our ram in the thicket is found in scripture and prayer. Open the eyes of our heart, Lord! We want to see you!!

Conclusion

Bible scholars call today's scripture by the title: "The binding of Isaac." I think we should retitle it: "The freeing of Isaac." That genius Sigmund Freud says there only two influences in our lives, both of which bind us. Nature and nurture. But we Christians know of another influence, don't we? Today's scripture from Genesis illustrates the third influence, which instead of binding us, frees us. As you sing the next hymn, I want you to think of who or what is your ram in the thicket. Think of who is the ram you find in scripture and prayer.

Glory be to God, Hallelujah, and all God's children say ...

Sing with me the hymn in the bulletin.