

Sermon preached at OCC, 28 June 2026

O God, our guide, set your path clearly before us and lead us to follow you willingly for the sake of Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Genesis 22:1-14

Questioning Faith

On the last weekend of May, I went to Gisborne to attend the celebration service at Gisborne Presbyterian Church. GPP was formed about 17 years ago when two churches – St. Andrew’s church and Matawhero Church, were combined. St. Andrew’s church has 150 years of history, and it was the hub of local musicians, the Gisborne Choral Society, and many other cultural events. Together with the church life, it has come to an end. While attending the service with other previous ministers, I couldn’t help but question if it meant our faith was lost or if it was the beginning of a new season that only God can reveal to us. Today’s reading from Genesis 22:1-14 helped me reflect on these hard questions, which we’ll explore with an honest heart.

Having questions about what we cherish the most is not a sign of weak faith. Sometimes it is how faith grows. As such, questioning faith is like, “Lord, help me understand,” while doubting faith is, “Lord, I cannot trust you.” In Genesis 22:1-14, God commanded Abraham to sacrifice Isaac as a burnt offering. Here we observe two things. When this impossible task was given, Abraham didn’t ask why. He simply obeyed. The other is that scriptures present Abraham acting in trust – when he replied to Isaac’s question of whereabouts a lamb for a burnt offering, he said God would provide it (v8).

Questioning faith- Abraham

The story begins, ‘After these things, God tested Abraham’ (22:1). Many things have happened already, including God’s call to Abraham to go to a land by leaving his Father’s house; God’s promise to Abraham to be the father of a great nation, to name a few. And now, God demands the most horrible thing:

“Take your son, your only son, whom you love, Isaac, and go to the land of Moriah and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains that I will show you” (22:2).

When Isaac asked about a burnt offering, Abraham prophetically answered, ‘God will provide- אֵלֹהִים himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son’ (v. 8a).¹ The word ‘provide’ is not a literal translation of the original Hebrew - יִרְאֶה as it means, ‘see/reveal.’ That is, ‘God will see himself the lamb for a burnt offering.’ While listening to Abraham’s story, it is actually we who either question or doubt it. We still wrestle with the question –why did God command him such as this?

Questioning vs Doubting

When it comes to faith, we often experience more uncertainties than certainties. Verse one shows such a thing: “After these things, God tested Abraham” (22:1). When Abraham left his Father’s house and land, he completely broke from his polytheistic past.² When this event was happening, Abraham lived among people who practised child sacrifice. Yet the story’s surprising ending shows that the God of Israel is unlike those gods. God provides the sacrifice instead. Abraham built altars to worship the one true God, such as Shechem and Bethel. And he knew what was happening in Canaan, including the child sacrifice.

The scripture says nothing about Abraham’s inner struggles – questioning faith in God. Rather, all the way through, we meet his silence till Mount Moriah with his beloved son, Isaac, who could have easily struggled/escaped from his elderly father’s strange act. But as we read, Abraham didn’t show any doubts in his faith and the last minutes, God stopped him from killing his own son, while providing a ram for the burnt offering as Abraham said to his son. We could see his faith not through his hand to draw a sword to kill his son, but in his words – “God himself will provide the lamb for a burnt offering, my son” (v8). It was even before they reached the destination. While listening to Abraham’s story, it is actually we who either question faith or doubt it. In today’s world, in which child protection is one of the highest priorities, after the whole church had to apologise for the victims happened in the name of God/Christianity. Some doubters may say that Christianity is dead and no longer influences society as before. But questioning faith builds up the church, while doubting faith destroys the church. We want to do the former, not the latter.

Questioning faith today

¹ Genesis 22:8 וַיֹּאמֶר אַבְרָהָם אֱלֹהִים יִרְאֶה לְעֹלֶה בְּנִי יִרְאֶה

² Genesis 12:1; Joshua 24:2

The theme *Questioning Faith* through Genesis 22:1-14 could bring more questions about God. In our story time, we heard a story about Simon, his wife, and the young man, an angel without wings, who had to find three answers to one question – *What Men Live By*. Like Abraham, Simon, and Martyona chose to act before they knew how things would turn out. Simon shared their only winter coat with the young man, and Matryona gave him the last bread to him. After the dinner, and observing the young man long and hard, Matryona felt that the young man seemed a good man, even though he wouldn't tell them who he was and why he was out there naked. And she sighed and told Simon that they had given, but nobody had given them anything. Simon didn't know what to say. Will they stop giving when they see the needy again? It is another kind of questioning faith for us.

After the celebration service, I met several people who were talking about how to continue as small groups with no concerns about maintaining the three church buildings. In the end, the church is people, not the buildings. Abraham's journey continued, and from his descendants, we have our Lord Jesus Christ. Questioning faith allows us to have the courage to be honest about our struggles and pain. Abraham thought he was about to lose God's promise. Instead, he discovered God's provision. GPP has come to an end, but God's work has not. Sometimes faith means letting go—not because God has finished, but because he is beginning something new. In the end, all these things have already been completed and proclaimed on the cross two thousand years ago. So, are we questioning faith or doubting faith? Without Christ Jesus, to whom can we go to find eternal life?³ May God help us understand it. Amen.

³ John 6:68