



Church of St. John the Evangelist, Elora
July 2 2023 - Fifth Sunday after Pentecost
Canon Paul Walker

Whoever welcomes you, welcomes
the one who sent me... and
whoever gives even a cup of cold
Lighthouse Lemonade on Canada
Day to one of these little ones will
receive their reward.

Yesterday we served over 70 litres of Lighthouse Lemonade on our front lawn for thirsty soap box derby racers and Canada Day parade spectators. That's almost 300 cups of lemonade. It was a fun and full morning of activity. Thank you to all who participated.

"How much does this cost?" one early customer asked. "Nothing!" came the reply, "It's free." But that was not the answer she was looking for or expecting. What she needed to do was somehow pay for it. She wanted to be relieved of her sense of indebtedness. And so, never missing an opportunity for people to exercise their gratitude and generosity, we put the donation box out! And she gladly gave to relieve herself of the burden of debt. By the end of the morning the box was filled with symbols of people relieving their sense of indebtedness.

But it wasn't about donations, it was about presence, visibility and engagement with our community. And it

wasn't about relieving people of the burden of debt, it was about meeting one another.

The ongoing story of Abraham and Sarah is one of meeting one others in a world that is unfamiliar, foreign and unknown to them. Remember that they are far from their homeland and in their old age their lives are changed with the birth of their son, Isaac. Abraham also has fathered another son, Ishmael, through Hagar, the Egyptian slave girl. But an encounter with three strangers in the desert informs Abraham and Sarah that another story is about to unfold. And for Hagar, an encounter with an angel in the desert informs her, as she looks on the death of her baby, Ishmael, that another story will unfold for her too. Both households are promised a future.

For all these characters it is about imagining a future that seems unimaginable. Sarah is old and childless, Hagar is destitute and dying. But to both of these women, a new vision is cast that they previously had no idea about.

Now it's Abraham's turn. Faced with the tension between faithfulness and love, he appears to choose faithfulness and astonishingly prepares to sacrifice his only son, who was going to be his promised future. It's a story that has a disturbing undercurrent of violence and betrayal to it. How far we go to sacrifice things that we love.

The story resolves when Abraham is able to bring his faithfulness to God *and* love for his son together as one. They are not to be differentiated or separated.

Whoever gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones will not lose their reward. Abraham will not lose God's favour for loving his son. Abraham will not be seen as faithless for loving his son. He does not need to sacrifice what he loves in pursuit of a dream.

Perhaps what Abraham's shocking willingness to sacrifice his son illustrates is that he is prepared to give up hope on what he *thought* was going to be his future. He's willing to let go of it. It's not about Isaac, it's about Abraham's attachments and God's provision.

"Where is the ram," Isaac asks?

"God will provide," Abraham replies.

Whatever the vessel, or the vehicle, or the way to get to the future, Abraham is somehow assured that God will provide. There will be a way, somehow, for the future to be fulfilled.

It's profoundly curious of course that this occurs on the *third day* of their journey. In the bible third days are typically days of new creation, resurrection and provision in unexpected ways.

But perhaps other questions for us to consider include how do *we* sacrifice things we love in the name of

serving God? Or how do we let go of our dreams for the future? Or, how do we offer the things we most love *to* God?

One thing we know is that God asks to be the primary focus of our lives. "Whoever loves brother or sister or mother or father more than me, is not worthy of me," Jesus says.

It's about our primary bonds of affection, loyalty and love. Where do they lie?

The great shema, known as the summary of the law, or the "Hear, O Israel" is what is recited at the beginning of the communion liturgy: "Love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, with all thy soul, with all thy mind, and with all thy strength."

And you do that by offering cups of lemonade to strangers, visiting the sick in hospital, being attentive to the needs of those around you, and reminding those who feel that they have been forgotten and abandoned by God that they are loved by God. It is what communion is intended to demonstrate for us in a concrete way: that God's favour is *always directed to* us and that we are connected to one another, both in this time and before all time. There's something beyond time about this mystery that reminds us of God's promise to provide. This is all good news, and for Abraham and for ourselves it allows us to be present for one another. For this we are most grateful.