

*“And Abraham lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, behind him was a ram, caught in a thicket by his horns. And Abraham went and took the ram and offered it up as a burnt offering instead of his son. So Abraham called the name of that place, ‘The LORD will provide’; as it is said to this day, ‘On the mount of the LORD it shall be provided.’”*

Dear Friends in Christ, and fellow redeemed:

You can't fault Isaac for asking the question. *“My father! Behold, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?”* (Genesis 22:7, ESV) After all, if you are going to offer a sacrifice, it would seem that more than anything else you need the sacrifice itself. Abraham simply answered: *“God will provide for himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son.”* (Genesis 22:8, ESV)

Of course, just listening to this part of the conversation makes everything seem so normal. It sounds as if Abraham was packing everything for their journey and simply forgot something. He seems to be covering it up by acknowledging that they will find what they need once they get to the place where they are going. It sounds as normal as a family going on vacation, and dad saying, “I forgot my toothbrush”, and mom saying, “Don't worry about it. I'm sure we can get one at the hotel.”

But we know there is much more to this conversation. We've already read the greater account of this journey in our Old Testament lesson today. This is one of the most significant and well-known events in biblical history. This isn't just a normal trip, a normal worship act involving the sacrifice of a lamb. This is something totally unexpected; totally foreign to everything we understand about God; totally out of character with all God's promises to Abraham. It all begins with God saying to Abraham: *“Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you.”* (Genesis 22:2, ESV)

We could spend time talking about the faith of Abraham that led him to make this journey and prepared him to offer his son, even though that must have been the hardest thing he could imagine doing. We could talk about God testing Abraham, and the difference between testing and the temptation that Jesus faced in the wilderness. We cannot read this account of Abraham offering Isaac without thinking about the connection with God's sacrifice of His Son for our sins.

Today we want to find comfort in the assurance that this event brings to us in the struggles of our lives. In our impossible moments; in the unexpected and uncharacteristic things of our lives, we can face each day with the same assurance, trust and confidence that Abraham found in the promise and love of our God. As Abraham discovered, God is always greater than our weakness. God's supply is always greater than our need. In his faithful confession of God as *Yahweh Yireh*, literally, “the Lord will provide”, Abraham tells us how we can triumph in the darkest moments of our lives. It is simple: we can trust in our loving God to provide His people and His church with whatever is necessary in their time of need.

Abraham learned to trust in the provision of the Lord under some very unique circumstances. Abraham's whole life is a lesson in trust. God told Abraham: *“Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”* (Genesis 12:1-3 - ESV) Trust me, Abraham, and go where I will lead you, and I will bless you. God promised Abraham descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky, or the sand on the seashore. But then God taught Abraham the importance of trust, by having him wait 25 years, until it seemed absolutely impossible for his only son to be born. And now, the same God who had promised to make Abraham into a great nation, says to him, *“Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you.”* (Genesis 22:2 - ESV) We cannot even imagine the pain in Abraham's heart as he walked to that mountain of sacrifice with his son. “How can God ask me to do this?” “How can I be the father of a great nation without a son?” But when Isaac asked, *“where is the lamb for a burnt offering?”* (Genesis 22:7 - ESV) Abraham's answer expresses simple hope and trust: *“God will provide for himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son.”* (Genesis 22:8 - ESV)

The Lord God did provide. Just as Abraham is raising the knife to slay his son, God stopped him, and in the thickets Abraham and Isaac found a ram which they offered in place of Isaac. That is why Abraham called the place *Yahweh Yireh*: the Lord will provide, and as our text says: *as it is said to this day, “On the mount of the Lord it shall be provided.”*

My dear people, loved by God, I know it can be hard to believe at times, but it is always true: the Lord *does* provide! In our epistle lesson today, James tells it like it is. He talks about trials, and think of all the trials and struggles that make themselves known in our lives day by day, year by year. This past year has been a difficult year. It’s hard to believe that it has been almost a year that our lives have been impacted by COVID-19. Even now we struggle on. We are still separated in many ways from one another. How many of our dear members have lost jobs and businesses? How many have had their bouts of illness? How many have felt alone and forgotten? But it isn’t just COVID. We have friends and former members who are struggling through the severe winter weather in Texas. We see the ongoing struggles of our Calgary economy, and its impact on families and on the job market. We have brothers and sisters in Christ who are dealing with failing health and with terminal illness. There are those who have lost loved ones and who struggle with the grief. There are broken families and broken relationships, even among God’s people in His church. I’m sure that each and every one of us can come up with many other trials, hardships and moments that just don’t make sense; that seem to be more than we can bear; that we sure are going to overwhelm us.

Yet James says: *“Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him.”* (James 1:12, ESV) He assures us of the very same truth that Abraham expressed when he declared: the Lord will provide! James puts it this way: *“Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change. Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.”* (James 1:17-18, ESV)

I know that there are times when we think these are just pious promises, or that they may be true for others, but they aren’t true for us. Let’s get one thing straight right away: God does not promise to provide us with all we want. He does not promise to do what we think is best. He doesn’t even tell us that He will make clear what all His plans and purposes are day by day. As He tested Abraham, so He tests us, asking us to trust Him. Even as we struggle, wondering what is going to come from whatever the circumstances may be, God comes to us and says, “Trust me. I will provide for you in accordance with My perfect, loving, and all knowing will.”

Yes, our God *does* provide! I could have chosen so many hymns today that express this confidence. The hymn writer says: *I am Jesus’ little lamb, Ever glad at heart I am; For my Shepherd gently guides me, Knows my need and well provides me, Loves me ev’ry day the same, Even calls me by my name.* (LSB 740, st. 1) Another says: *Now thank we all our God With hearts and hands and voices, Who wondrous things has done, In whom His world rejoices; Who from our mothers’ arms Has blest us on our way With countless gifts of love And still is ours today.* (LSB 895, st. 1) And in one of the favourites of our people, we are assured: *Have we trials and temptations? Is there trouble anywhere? We should never be discouraged—Take it to the Lord in prayer. Can we find a friend so faithful Who will all our sorrows share? Jesus knows our ev’ry weakness—Take it to the Lord in prayer.* (LSB 770, st. 2)

We can be sure of the Lord’s love and care for us in all our needs. That takes us back to the mountain that Abraham called *Yahweh Yireh*: the Lord will provide. On that mountain, in place of Isaac, the Lord provided a ram which Abraham offered as a sacrifice. That mountain would later become the sight of the temple in Jerusalem. But on a nearby hill in that region—a hill we call Calvary—the greatest sacrifice of all was offered for us, as God gives us His Son, His only Son, whom He loves, as a sacrifice of atonement that takes away our sin and shame. In His death, Jesus Christ, the perfect, spotless Lamb, provides His righteousness for sinners like you and me so that God no longer sees the ugly reality of who we are; rather He sees the beauty and holiness of His Son surrounding us and covering us. *The Lord Provides* and gives us His Spirit who brings us to that faith and hope we have in Jesus. *The Lord Provides*, giving us a place in His family as His children and as heirs of heaven. *The Lord Provides* for our needs. As Paul assures us: *He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?* (Romans 8:32 - ESV) Our God provides the forgiveness that gives us a place in His family. He blesses us with the life we have in the risen Saviour. And day by day, God continues to provide for every need. Jesus said: *Therefore do not be anxious, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.* (Matthew 6:31-33 - ESV)

We are blessed indeed, for we have a heavenly Father who is well aware of our needs and provides for our lives moment by moment, day after day. His provision encompasses everything that we need for this world. Best of all, He gives us what is

necessary for our soul's salvation. On a hill far away, God put up a symbol of His promise. The cross stands before us as a vivid reminder of all that God has done and is doing and will do for us. Through the cross, our loving Saviour has given us perfect healing and the forgiveness that sets us free from sin's condemning power. The empty tomb assures us of the life He will give us—a life that is greater than the very power of death itself. Yes, the cross and the empty tomb of Jesus speak of the Lord who provides, and who will ever provide for the people He loves—and you can trust Him to do it for you. Amen.