

**The Rev. Catherine A. Caimano**  
**Proper 8A – Genesis (22:1-14); Romans (6:12-23); Matthew (10:40-42)**  
**June 29, 2008**  
**St. John's Episcopal Church, Wichita, KS**

"He bound his son Isaac, and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood."

In today's reading from Genesis, one of the most profound and troubling stories in all of the Bible, Abraham and Isaac are both in a bind.

Abraham is bound by his faith, bound by a promise that God made to him and then fulfilled, bound by the voice of God that is real to him, so real that he feels compelled to obey, even at such a horrific cost. And it doesn't say so in our text, but we can so easily imagine that Abraham is also bound by his fear, the constriction of his heart, his own terror, his own grief in advance of what he feels bound to do.

And Isaac is bound, literally, by the rope that prepares him for death.

Scholars differ on the age of Isaac in this story, some see him as a young child, some see him as old enough to consent to what is happening, but either way he is also bound by the trust he has in his father; in the poignant way he asks, 'where is the lamb for the burnt offering?' he is bound by his ignorance, he is bound by the very things that make him so precious that he is in this terrible situation to begin with: how much his parents love him, how much he is wanted, how many hopes and dreams are bound up in his existence.

And this whole story binds both these men to the life of Israel that follows after the events of this day – the growth, as promised, of Abraham's family from a single son to a whole nation, a nation that often finds itself in its own binds – from slavery to wilderness to warfare to destruction – but bound by blood, bound by history, bound by faith they work to persevere.

And in all of this they are bound by God.

They are bound by the covenant God made with us at the time of the first humans, and has renewed in countless ways since then – that this is good, this creation; that WE are good, and that God is so good that God has given us life and has promised to never let us go. We are bound up in God from the day we take our first breath, in the stories we are told, in the lessons we learn, in every attempt we ever make to love and be loved.

We are bound by the gifts that we don't usually think about – by the air and the water and creatures that we cannot exist without, and the strength and intelligence and gifts that we use every day. And we are bound in our actions of praise and thanksgiving – in births and deaths and sudden, surprising events that cause us to notice how close we actually are to God.

And in God, we are bound to one another – by blood and friendship and work and love and proximity; we are bound by thousands of meals and millions of tears, by laughter and conversation and silence.

But in this, too, we are bound by our pain. We are bound by disappointment and anger, by greed and manipulation. We are bound by what we have done and what we have failed to do, by ancient wounds and family secrets. We are bound by our work and our expectations, our bills and our debts, by our violence and our hunger, by our acceptance of easy answers and our failure to confront wrongs.

The whole world is bound by pollution and warfare, poverty, illness and incessant consumerism. We are bound by the decisions made by kings centuries ago, and actions taken by strangers today. We are bound by wind and rain and snow and the violent movements of the earth, and by whatever calamity they leave behind. We are bound by our powerlessness to end the magnitude of suffering around us, and by our compassion and empathy for those who endure that suffering.

And in ALL of this we are bound by God.

We are bound by our questioning and our doubting and our hoping that God is working everything out. We are bound by our fear that God might be punishing us, and our greater fear that God might not be paying attention at all.

Certainly this morning we are bound to consider that God may try and test us, may try and ask of us more than is fair, more than a loving and generous God would ask. We are bound by our desire for a God we could understand, a God that we might point to and say, 'our God erased poverty this morning,' 'our God no longer allows children to suffer,' our God would never ask a man to sacrifice his son.

We are bound together in a longing for ANSWERS, a need for the whys and wherefores of God to add up to something that we can get comfortable with.

But instead we get Jesus, who says, 'I will be bound, too.'

I will be bound by anger and fear and greed and vengeance, I will be bound by your blood, and your grief and your tears. I will be bound by all the suffering, every death, each and every moment of doubt there has ever been. Don't try to stop me, Jesus says, don't try to talk me out of this binding and don't wish it were any other way. And don't, whatever you do, try to figure it out.

Instead, feel your own bonds, feel the grip of what binds you to sin, what binds you to death. Feel the sacrifice that we make each time we threaten the bonds of love, the bonds of forgiveness, the bonds of peace, all our abandonments of the bonds of humanity. Allow yourself to be wrapped up in all of this, and offer it all to me. It's the only way, says Jesus, as scary as it may seem, contrary to everything that feels comfortable and good.

The more we try and free ourselves, the more entangled in frustration we become.

Instead, tighten the cords that keep us from breathing true life, wrap up your pain and your lostness and your mistakes, offer it up, put it on me, says Jesus. All of us together, our sin and our death, everything that separates us from the bonds of brotherhood, the bonds of love, let it go, let it bind me to darkness, let it bind me beyond what suffering humanity has ever known.

And I will break those bonds, and THIS will set you free.