

ZIONSVILLE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

REV. JIM CAPPS- JUNE 10, 2012

"THE LORD WILL PROVIDE"

GENESIS 22:1-14

Today, I want to approach this particular message in a little different manner. Believing that it is good to mix it up once in a while, I am going to share several true stories. It's like we are putting together a string of pearls.. Each story is like a precious pearl giving us a greater understanding of the assurance that "the Lord will provide."

Read- Genesis 22:1-14

THE STORY OF ABRAHAM'S TESTING

How would you like to have a name like the "Father of Multitudes" and then be childless? That would have been a heavy burden to bear. That burden got even heavier the older he got. With that name, God had promised Abraham that his family would become a great nation who would be a blessing to the world. His offspring would be like the stars in the heavens.

When Abraham was a 100 years old, God gave him a son, Isaac. Talk about a miraculous provision! Somehow, I picture Abraham spent lots of time with his offspring, doing all those things a father does with a son, especially after so many years without a child.

Then came the ominous day when God put Abraham's love for and faith in Him to the test. God calls Abraham by name and like such great Old Testament characters as Moses and Samuel, Abraham, answers, "Here I am."

God then speaks difficult words which must have been devastating to hear. "Take your son, your only son, Isaac, whom you love, and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains I will tell you about." Can you imagine the shock and sense of overwhelming grief Abraham must have felt? The Canaanites, all around them, offered child sacrifices, but God had never asked for that; especially in light of God's promise to him.

Yet, being a man of faith and believing that God's ways were higher than his ways, we are told that "Early the next morning" Abraham made the necessary preparations to obediently make the 3 day journey. Notice, we are not told that he said anything to Sarah. He wasn't going to give her the opportunity to let her talk him out of what God had called him to do.

On the third day of the journey, Abraham looked up from his deep thought, and saw the high hill where they were to make their offering. He left the servants and the donkey, put the wood for the offering on his son's back, and carried with him the coals of fire and the knife needed for the offering.

From the beginning, Isaac, probably teenager, realized there was something different from the other times they had traveled together. His father had been very serious and pre-occupied. Finally as they

are climbing the hill, Isaac broke the somber silence with the question, "The fire and the wood are here, but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?"

With a forced smile and tears streaming down his cheeks, Abraham answers, "God Himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son." Then they continued to the top.

With the help of his son, Abraham builds the altar out of rocks. Then, in familiar fashion, Abraham takes the wood which he brought and carefully places it on the altar. After this comes the tough part as Abraham ties up his son, his only son, whom he loves and tenderly places him on the wood on the altar. In shocked disbelief, Isaac cooperates with his now sobbing father. There is no question that he could have escaped, but out of deep love for his father he is compliant.

The dreaded moment has arrived when Abraham reaches for the knife. He raises it high and is ready to plunge it into Isaac when the voice of an angel comes to him from heaven, "Abraham! Abraham!" Abraham again responds, "Here I am."

Quickly the angel tells him that he has passed the test. There is no question that he fears and loves God more than all else. Abraham hears a commotion in some nearby bushes. He looks to see a ram caught by its horns. Realizing that this was God's doing, he untied and embraced Isaac and then took the ram and offered it to the God who had provided for them that day. He named the place "The Lord Will Provide."

It's at this moment of supreme celebration that God renews His covenant with Abraham, telling him that his descendants will be like the stars of the sky and the sand on the seashore. They will overtake their enemies and they will be a blessing to all nations.

In the marvelous story of Abraham's test, we see how the Lord provides

THE STORY OF JESUS, THE LAMB OF GOD.

When we fast forward several centuries to the First Century A. D., we see that God doing something He didn't require Abraham to do. The Holy Righteous Creator of all that is was willing to break through human history, once and for all coming to the world in the form of a human being. Like Isaac and Abraham, Jesus is God's Son, His only son, whom He loved.

We believe that Jesus lived a sinless life, presenting the ultimate paradigm of how God meant for life to be lived. His words and His life were in stark contrast to the religious leaders of His day. He made them feel very uncomfortable and jealous as they looked at His popularity. Believing that He threatened their very way of life, they felt a need to get rid of Him.

We know the story of how Jesus became the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. In the Old Testament, a lamb was slain and offered to bring atonement for the sins of the people. It was the means by which they could be reconciled with the Holy, Righteous God who by His very nature abhorred and was repulsed by sin.

Did you know that when Jesus climbed the hill of Golgatha, as the Son with the cross, the wood for His offering on His back, He was at the very same area where Abraham was tested? The difference is that Jesus was the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. God did not spare His Son. Why? "For

God so loved the world that He gave (offered) His one and only Son (whom He loved) that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.”- John 3:16

Jesus, the Lamb of God, was God’s ultimate sacrifice or provision for our sins. Just as was true for Abraham, this provision is not forced on us. We must respond to God’s gracious gift of forgiveness and eternal life. If God was willing to go to this extent, you can be certain that God passionately desires to be in a personal, on-going relationship with each one of us. He will not force Himself on us. We must respond in faith by simply receiving His gift of forgiveness and reconciliation. Indwelt by God’s Holy Spirit, we then begin a life-long journey with our Awesome Creator God.

In the story of Jesus’ coming as the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world, in the ultimate way, we see the Lord providing.

THE STORY OF HERMIONI LOKKO

I met Hermioni Lokko in July of 2003 in Accra, Ghana. She was 18 years old and is the only child of her mother, Pearl, who has always been a single parent. Little did I know what God had in store for her and us, when one evening I asked her at dinner what she was going to do with the rest of her life?

Very focused, Hermioni said she was going to become a doctor and come back to Manna Mission to serve. As we talked about where she would receive her education, she said her only option was Ghana. Without thinking I asked her if she would like to receive her education in the United States. She said that she would, but that she and her mother could never afford it. That’s where the miracle began.

First, her mother, because of her great love for Hermioni, let her only daughter, whom she loved, leave home and country, and come to the United States. That was a sacrifice which began in December of 2003. Betsey, a woman from our church on the mission trip, sacrificed to pay Hermioni’s airfare and expenses during the first few weeks. Then Ronnie and Tracy made a home for Hermioni and treated her like a daughter. Tracy even sacrificially started a business to help pay for Hermioni’s college education at IUPUI which, as an international student, was \$28,000. Jim, an area car dealer, provided her with a good car during her 3 ½ years in college. People gave sacrificially in all kinds of ways, so even though we didn’t have the first cent when she arrived and nothing came out of a church budget, we had \$34,000 in the bank for her when she graduated. God had provided in a marvelous way that was a faith lift to all of us.

Hermioni joined our church and became involved, attending church every Sunday She also worked with our junior high youth group on Friday nights as well as mission trips and camp. Hermioni was employed at IUPUI as a mentor and then a mentor to the mentors in the School of Science. As a matter of principle, she tithed or gave to the church 10% of anything she made. It was her expression of gratitude to the God who provides.

Again not knowing where the money would come from, I took Hermioni to Boston to interview with the Harvard Medical School, from which she graduated on the 24th of May. In the middle of her 4 years at HMS, she felt strongly about applying to Harvard’s Kennedy School of Government to get a Master’s of Public Policy Degree, again not knowing where the money would come from. While no one knew about it, each year one of the 70 students in that program would receive a \$70,000 scholarship. Hermioni was selected.

God has provided for Hermioni each step of the way even to the point of getting her first choice in residencies, Massachusetts General Hospital, where she will spend the next 4 years. As I heard Hermioni welcome everyone and play a major leadership role in HMS' graduation ceremony, I reminisced on how God was honoring the sacrifice of many as He provided for her above and beyond what we could have ever imagined.

In the story of Hermioni Lokko, God has and continues to provide in a manner beyond my wildest dreams.

THE STORY OF THE PAST FISCAL YEAR AT ZIONSVILLE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

At this time, I would like to call on Bob Bierwagen, president of the corporation and chair of the finance team here at ZPC, who is going to tell us about how God has provided for us in this past year.

Bob's Presentation

After both services this morning, Bob will be in the chapel to go deeper and answer questions. A copy of the 2012-13 budget will be available there as well as at the Welcome Center for anyone who has an interest.

THE STORY OF THE FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF SAN ANTONIO

The final story of God providing took place at the First Presbyterian Church of San Antonio, where I served for 18 months up until last July. Not unlike this church, it was a church with well-educated people who were very successful as viewed through the lens of our culture. 275 of our 3,000-plus members were lawyers plus many others who were movers and shakers in the community.

During the first few weeks of my time there, we adopted a budget that was projected to have expenses exceed income by \$205,000, which everyone agreed could happen for only one year. We were in a season of transition with many people upset with the last pastor who left suddenly after only 4 years.

In the first few months of the year, the financial picture looked even more dismal than projected. At this time two years ago, we thought our deficit at the end of 2010 could be as high as \$500,000. Since the church was committed to giving 25% of its income to missions, we prepared for what seemed like massive staff cuts like were happening in large Presbyterian churches all across the country. In the attempt to be prepared we had 3 different scenarios set for balancing the budget for 2011. As you might imagine, staff morale was low.

As we prepared for the Fall, as a leadership team and session, we felt God saying that we needed to let the people know where we were and preach a series of messages on the joy of giving. We emphasized that everything we have comes from God; we are to give from the first fruits and not the leftovers; we are to be give a tithe or 10%, even though it may, at times be difficult; and God calls us to be willing to sacrifice, just as people of old and He sacrificed. Our purpose was not to motivate by undue guilt, but for people to experience the joy of being invested in what God is doing in our midst.

In a way far beyond any of our doing, God lifted our faith, as people gave sacrificially, in some cases. When it was all said and done, we all felt like the Lord had provided. When the books were closed on

2010, instead of having as much as a \$500,000 deficit, we had a surplus of \$293,000. God had provided in ways beyond our dreams. In gratitude to God, 75% of the surplus was given to missions and the other 25% to fund new ministries.

Furthermore, as people made faith commitments for 2011, not only were we able to keep all of our employees, but we were able to give modest raises since the staff had not received an increase for some time. The wonder and beauty of it all was that people felt great joy in seeing how God had worked. It was far bigger than anything any of us could have accomplished or taken credit for. It was God providing tangibly in a way that people in our culture highly value- in dollars and cents.

Dear friends, in this season of transition and uncertainty, I believe that God is calling each of us to be willing to sacrifice to be joyfully invested in what He is doing here at ZPC. God is already doing great things and there are some really exciting days ahead. We are going to see God at work in our midst in a way above and beyond what we could ever ask or think.

I would challenge each one of us to prayerfully consider how God might be calling us to give sacrificially to what He is and will be doing in and through ZPC. What does that look like for you?

If there are those of you who would like to pray with some after the service, either about what we have talked about today, or about concerns or praises you brought with you when you came, there will be members of our prayer team in the alcove by the cross afterwards. They would consider it a privilege to listen and pray with you.