

## Sermon: Remember What God Has Provided

Genesis 22:1-19

August 10, 2008

God provides for us. Amen? Amen. God is faithful.

Coming here to intern at Oxford Circle this summer was not just hap-hazard for me. God provided this opportunity despite my questions, uncertainties, and frustrations. This past spring semester at college, I was looking around for a summer job, something that would be fulfilling, would give me valuable experience and training for the future, as well as something that would pay to get me through my last year of college. Well, as you can probably imagine, these kinds of summer jobs are few and far between, and my search was beginning to feel unsuccessful. I had contacted Franconia Mennonite Conference to inquire about possible internships or opportunities they may have for college students this summer. I had hopes they would find something great for me, but when they were largely unresponsive for a few months, I began to doubt that they would pull through. I was becoming stressed and frustrated, wanting to secure my summer plans and have everything in place. Time was getting short and I wanted to have everything under control.

Finally, I realized that I needed to let it go and trust in God, as hard as that is for me to do. I prayed, “God, I don’t know what you have for me this summer but you are in control and I must trust that you are leading and will provide.” And not long after releasing my plans into God’s hands, did I suddenly, out of the blue one day, receive a long, detailed email from Franconia Conference outlining potential plans for my summer—wonderful plans, for which I was very excited. I was invited to go to Spain and Morocco for a month with a group from the conference and follow it up by interning at Oxford Circle and experiencing urban ministry. I couldn’t have planned it out better if I had tried. These opportunities were ones of which I knew very little details, what to expect, and what I’d be doing. However, they were also opportunities that would serve to be entirely beneficial, rewarding, and lots of fun. God provided for me, despite my doubt, my uncertainties, and my frustrations. But I had to remember to trust.

Trust is a huge issue when speaking of God’s provision. Believing that God will come through for us and meet our needs is oftentimes really hard. How do we know that God will rescue us? How can we be certain that God will be faithful? Where do we even begin in trying to let go?

As we reflect on the story of Abraham, we can see quite clearly how Abraham had a radical trust in God. Abraham’s trust in God and commitment to God was so great that he was

willing to sacrifice his son, Isaac, [if God was really calling him to that action]. I can't imagine how absurd and unbelievable and inappropriate Abraham must have thought this idea was. Isaac was his only son—the son he had waited *years* to hold in his arms; the son that he pleaded God would give him. Why would God then ask Abraham to give up the only son he had ever known? It doesn't make sense or seem just in light of our loving, generous God. Nevertheless, Abraham was firm in his faith and belief that God would not leave him stranded. Abraham responded to God's call—without record of even arguing with God—even though it seemed both crazy and scary. God would provide, though, despite Abraham's uncertainties and questions and despair. And God did provide. God provided Abraham and Isaac with a ram for their sacrifice and a renewed sense of life and thanksgiving for both of them. God provided a way out of the destructive and deadly situation.

What extreme obedience and faith in God's plan Abraham exemplifies in this story. He didn't let his doubts and fears take over, but instead trusted that God was at work for the best in even the most difficult of situations. Abraham did not try to control the situation himself, but allowed God to work and move in both his and Isaac's life, surrendering all plans to God.

As we see clearly from this story, God does not leave us helpless and abandoned. God cares for us and will continue, time and again, to rescue us and deliver us as we seek to follow God's direction. What God has done in the past God will continue to do in the future.

Part of having this trust and solid faith is waiting on the Lord. We can be certain and sure of God's promise and love. This trusting rarely comes easily, though—especially in difficult situations. Patience is tough—and it's annoying. We can believe that, yes, God will provide—but when? And yes, God answers prayer—but what do we do in the meantime? God provides in God's timing, which is not usually our own timing. And God works in mysterious ways, sometimes answering our prayers in different ways than what we were hoping for. Sometimes the way in which God does provide for us and meet our needs is not at all the way that we were expecting or anticipating. Sometimes we may not even realize, right away, that God is, in fact, answering our prayers and meeting our needs. We may be so focused on the one thing that we want and how we think God *should* be responding to us that we miss the great things that God is showing us and blessing us with right here and now.

The Bible is full of stories and teachings that convey to us how we shouldn't worry—that we don't need to be concerned with what's next in our life or where we'll be in five years. Just as we see with Abraham, we are better off hoping in God's plan than left to our own devices, trying to control everything ourselves. Jesus tells us in Luke 12, not to worry at all about our

life, not to be preoccupied with the little stuff that doesn't matter in the long run anyway. Because God takes care of and provides for even the lilies and birds—and they're not concerned about their lives and necessities. Philippians urges us not be anxious about anything, but to instead present our requests and our fears to God. And then God's peace will be with us. We don't have to worry; we don't have to plan out every detail.

God will not fail us. As we believe and obey God, God will provide and will direct our lives. As we learn from Abraham that we must not withhold anything from God, God, in turn, does not withhold blessings and provisions from us. We experience God's grace and love each and every day. God can and will do more than we could ever ask or imagine.

It is good to remember what God has done and what God is doing now, in our own lives. When have you been in situations in which you were waiting on God and hoping for God's faithful provision? Is there something that you're waiting on right now?

There are countless times and ways that God has provided for and delivered God's people in circumstances of need. We read these stories in the Bible, we listen to and learn from each other, we think back to times in our own lives when God answered our prayers and pulled us through hardships. Remembering God's provision in the past helps us to trust God for the future. God is faithful and will not give up on us, regardless of faults, insecurities, or painful occurrences. God's provision is not once and done—God has provided and will *continue* to provide for us, our families, and the world, as we remember God's faithfulness, seek God's guidance, and hope in God's promises.

Let us continue to think on and remember God's faithfulness in providing for us as we break into our groups and work together on our banner projects. I'd invite you to find the group with which you were working two weeks ago, to begin constructing your banner. As we go, let us continue to share our stories of God's work in our lives with one another. May we all be encouraged, supported, and uplifted by each others' stories and experiences as we go from this place into our community and world. (You may go find your group.)

Benediction:

Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we could ever ask or imagine, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, for ever and ever. Amen.