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**“The Freedom of Sacrifice”**  
Genesis 22:1-14

In 1996 a writer by the name of Linda Ellis penned a popular poem entitled “The Dash.” (No, it is not a commentary on how we so often live our lives... as a **dash**. Dashing here and there...) It speaks of a man who stood to speak at the funeral of a friend, who begins his eulogy by mentioning the man’s tombstone, which, of course, listed his date of birth, and then the date on which he died. But that “what mattered most of all was the dash between those years.” A simple, fairly obvious statement, perhaps, but true nonetheless... that the most important part of our lives can be contained in the smallest, seemingly most insignificant way. A little punctuation mark known as a ‘dash.’

The manner in which the most important part of a life can come in the smallest, seemingly most insignificant way occurred to me in reading the first part of today’s passage from *Genesis*. In the first verse we read that God called out Abraham’s name, to which he replied, **“Here I am.”** God then goes on, in verse 2, to tell him to **“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 I will show you.”** And then, in the very next verse, we read that **“So Abraham rose early in the morning... and went** (with his son Isaac) **to the place God had shown him.”** (Gen. 22:1-3)

THAT’S IT? Abraham, who with his wife Sarai has waited some 80+ years to have this boy Isaac, is told by God to take this beloved son and ‘offer him as a **burnt offering**.’ Take your boy to a remote mountain and ‘KILL HIM, AND THEN REDUCE HIS BODY TO ASHES.’ And upon hearing this shocking, numbing request, what comes next? **“Abraham got up early the next morning...”**

HUH? ‘Just another day at the office?’ Do you think that perhaps one of the most important conversations EVER between a mom and dad was contained in that seeming small, insignificant space between verses 2 and 3? Just what happened in that little ‘dash’?

What happened was that two parents received a command from God that NO parent would ever wish to receive. And that they had to grapple with how to **respond** to that

command. What PRICE were they willing to pay for OBEDIENCE to God's will for their lives... the life of the precious child that they loved? While Abraham was no doubt one of the strongest of God's chosen leaders for His people, he was also **human**. He, and Sara both, HAD to be filled with anguish and doubt... anger and bewilderment. 'Exclamation' and 'question marks' to go with their 'dash.' WHY would God ask such a thing of them? Hadn't they had enough tests already? How could the God that they *knew* loved *them* so much ask them to give up the one that *they loved* SO much!

The answer is, of course, that we don't KNOW just how they dealt with this test! And perhaps, the answer is that they didn't really know how to either! That rather than expect the answer to their questions, what they believed to be most important was to be AVAILABLE to God. To follow God and He would reveal the answer to them as He chose. That the bottom line was to TRUST and OBEY. Simply by saying, 'OK Lord... here I am. I don't understand just what you're up to, but I'm going to trust you ANYWAY. I know that you ultimately love me, and so I'm going to be open to however you want to use me. HERE I AM.'

There is great power in that one sentence...those three simple words: "**Here I am.**" On three distinct occasions in this brief passage... to 3 different persons... Abraham made that simple... or maybe NOT-so-simple... declaration. One that most always comes in **response** to first being **called**. A statement that can involve both great **sacrifice...** and great **freedom**. By being **available**.

First Abraham said "Here I am" to GOD. But only after he had heard God call him by name. When Abraham **responded** to God's call... a very risky action... he indicated his openness to being **available**. His willingness to 'trust and obey.' And boy did he get more than he bargained for. Do you think he was sorry that he did? Again, that would be speculation... natural, of course... but we don't KNOW how Abe and Sarah felt. But by being **willing** to make the **sacrifice** God called him to do... by being **available** to serve God's will... Abraham demonstrated a powerful trust in God that was **liberating**. Free from bondage of fear, of doubt... that no matter what, God would take care of him... of Sara... of Isaac. Abraham trusted in "*Jehovah Jireh*," one of the Hebrew names for God. Literally, "*The Lord will provide.*" Abraham believed with all his heart that 'God *would* provide.'

Second, Abraham told **ISAAC** "Here I am." When his son called out to him, he **responded**. Even though it was also risky. What would he say to his child if he questioned what was to happen to him? What if his son accused him of abandoning him? Would Abe be sorry he responded? Sometimes we think that SILENCE is the best answer when we don't know what to say. But Abraham knew that Isaac must know of his presence. He wanted his boy to know that he was there for him... that he was **Available**. "*Here I am, my son.*" Abraham sought to be an example to Isaac that no matter what, the God they worshipped *would* take care of him. That no matter what **sacrifices** had to be made, they could yet be **free** from fear and doubt because of their **trust** in God. "*Jehovah Jireh.*" God *will* provide.

And finally, Abraham told the **ANGEL** "Here I am." When this messenger... this perfect stranger... called out to him, he **responded**. Abraham **trusted** that God was speaking to him at a time when he most needed him... even if it was through someone he did not know. On the verge of making a **sacrifice** that he did NOT want to make... proving to God his being **available** for even the most difficult level of service... Abraham listened to the voice of someone he did not know. A voice who spoke for someone he most certainly DID know. The Lord who WILL provide...

So just what is it that WE are to 'know' from the experience of Abraham? That God might ask one of us to sacrifice his/her own child? To lay down one's own life? Probably not... though through the ages, many HAVE, and still do, make the ultimate sacrifice for freedom... for an earthly nation, or a heavenly kingdom. BUT, in one way or another, ALL of us ARE called to make **sacrifices** for our God. Sacrifices of our time. Of our money. Of our pride. Of our comfort. Of our security. Of our 'safe space.' Of our personal preferences.

What sacrifices are YOU being called to make? That's between you and God. But I will say this: **True sacrifice begins with the willingness to make it.** The first step in becoming a true disciple of Jesus Christ is to, in the words of the young lady pastor we heard from at the Holy Spirit Symposium, '**recognize**' the role of the Holy Spirit in saying, "***Here I am.***" To be made **available** for God's service. To say 'here I am' to God... to say 'here I am' to your loved ones... to say 'here I am' to perfect 'strangers' (who are usually sent by a 'perfect God!') To humbly **submit** to the will of our Lord Jesus in such a way that will in truth make us **free** in a way like no

other. In His words, ***“If the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.”*** (John 8:36) Even in our deepest struggles, we can always rest assured of God’s promise made flesh in Jesus Christ: in the **sacrifice** of his life, we have **freedom** over death.

In December of 1776... only months after our country’s Declaration of freedom from the oppressive rule of England... Thomas Paine, one of the founding fathers of our country, wrote these words: *“These are the **times that try men’s souls**: The summer soldier and the sunshine patriot will, in this crisis, shrink from the service of his country; but **he that stands it now, deserves the love and thanks** of man and woman. **Tyranny, like hell, is NOT easily conquered**; yet we have this consolation with us, that the harder the conflict the more glorious the triumph.”* (Thomas Paine, *The Crisis*, December 1776)

Thomas Paine was, by all indications, NOT a follower of Jesus Christ. And yet, his words can still hold truth for us as believers. As we look at the news today, 200 years later, filled with disease, despair, decadence, division, delusion, dying, and death... these are STILL the **‘times that try the souls’** of all mankind. Too often we too can be so many **‘sunshine patriots,’** who, in times of **crisis, shrink** from the **service** of our GOD. Like **hell**, the **tyranny** of doubt and disbelief is **NOT easily conquered**. But in Christ, we have the assurance, the consolation, that the harder the conflict the more glorious the triumph.

Today, we celebrate those mortal men and women who endured harder conflicts to reap a more glorious triumph. We give love and thanks for those who did not shrink from the service of their country. Those who have afforded us **freedom** by their **sacrifice**. By simply being **‘available.’** Who answered a **call**. Who exemplified **trust... obedience**. Faithful servants indeed... like Abraham. Like Jesus. And, by God’s grace and Spirit... like us. Servants who simply say, “HERE I AM, LORD”...

### **INTRO TO OPENING HYMN**

Today we celebrate both a secular ‘holi-day’ Independence Day... and well as a religious ‘holy day’ – the Sacrament of the Lord’s Supper. Along with our reading from the Genesis story of Abraham and Isaac, both of these days relate to the central themes of SACRIFICE... and FREEDOM. All that we risk losing in order to gain the ultimate victory. And so, to open our worship I offer you this quote from a writer named Booker T. Stallworth of Tacoma, Washington, who describes himself in this way: “Believer, husband, father, communications professional and passionate advocate for free individuals, the free-market and free societies.”

Stallworth wrote, *“the freedom we enjoy is the glorious triumph of our patriots’ work... We cannot fully appreciate our nation’s birth without remembering those who risked it all to make it happen, and those today who do the same to protect it.”* In remembrance of those who risked it all, let us now STAND, as we celebrate the freedom we enjoy...the glorious triumph of our patriot’s work. Please join me in singing “America, America”...

### **CHARGE/BENEDICTION**

I would leave you this morning with a couple of quotes. First, the closing lines of that poem I referred to earlier, “The Dash” --“So, when your eulogy is being read, with your life’s actions to rehash...would you be proud of the things they say about how you spent YOUR dash?” And second, by Greg Murtha. He was that strong Christian I spoke of last week, who said of his impending passing into glory that “a funeral service should NOT be all dressed in black, somber, serving cookies and kool-aid. That’s OK if you’re in Pre-K.” But instead, should be a celebration that bears witness to what he called “THE PLAN”... to “Skid *into heaven broadside in a cloud of smoke, thoroughly used up, totally worn out, and loudly proclaim, ‘Wow!’ What a ride!*” May his words describe how we spend OUR ‘dash.’ And now, as you go forth to ‘dash’ out the door, remember that in living that ‘dash’ out, you do not do so alone. But that the Spirit of the living God...