



The Anglican Parish of Whangaparaoa Peninsula
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Sermon

The Cost and the Reward

Matthew 10:40-42; Genesis 22:1-14; Romans 6:12-23;

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You have just heard read one of the most startling acts of trust that is contained in the Bible. Here is a man who has waited for twenty years to have his promised son born to him. He has watched him grow up and will be as proud as any Dad with a young child. Now the same God who promised him a son asks to take that son away from him.

And it is more than just the sacrifice of the boy that is at stake. Abraham has been promised that through him, all the nations of the world will be blessed. He has been promised that the sands on the seashore and the stars in the sky are as numerous as his descendants. Abraham has been promised land where his descendants will live.

Blessing, land, descendants, all these things have been promised to Abraham again and again, nine times in fact. Blessing, Land, and Descendants, all will stop the moment the knife enters Isaac's heart. Abraham's very reason for existing will die with his son.

Can you put yourself in Abraham's shoes? Can you feel with him what he was going through?

Yet despite that what is his response? "Early next morning Abraham got up and set off in obedience to God's call." Gen 22:3

That is what it means to be a follower of Jesus. To place Jesus before everything in your life. To be willing to lay down your most precious dreams. To place your most cherished possessions in His hands to do with as He wills. Even your wife/husband, children and parents come second to Him.

Last week we were talking with a missionary who is currently at home waiting until the country she is in opens its borders again. We asked her how the work was progressing, and she told us of the miracles that she is seeing and the delight of watching people come to a living relationship with the living Lord Jesus. How exciting it must be to see people coming to Our Lord in that way. What a delight to be part of a ministry like that.

But there is a cost. We asked if she and her team suffered persecution. Her answer startled us. She did. And most of it came from Christians who objected to her work. She told of how being informed on to the Authorities meant that she had to be hidden away for her safety. She told of her concern for members of her team who had been told that the police were going to take them away for interrogation. She knew that if they were taken, she would be unlikely to see them again.

Yet she was looking forward to going back as soon as the borders are open again.

Early in the morning Abraham went.....

There is a cost to discipleship and ministry no matter where in the world it happens. When Lorraine was Vicar of Birkdale/Beach Haven she was asked by the Bishop to be one of the people who interview candidates for ordination. The one thing she looked for was whether the person had been called by God to ordination. She told each candidate that if they were called, then don't stay away. You will never be content doing anything else. If, however, you are NOT called please don't come. Ministry is too hard and too costly, and you will not be able to survive if you are not sustained by God's call.

It is not only those called to ministry though who need to count the cost. The Gospel reading today is preceded by Jesus telling of the cost of being His disciple. Listen again to this:

“A student is not above his teacher nor a servant above his master. It is enough for the student to be like his teacher and the servant his master. If the head of the house has been called Beelzebub, how much more the members of the household.” [Matt 10:24-25.]

Jesus was misunderstood and vilified; so shall we.

Jesus won the world by way of the cross. We too will find that the only way to real life is to give up our lives for Him. The cost to being Jesus' disciple is very high and we must face this squarely so that when it gets tough, we will not waiver from our discipleship.

Early in the morning Abraham went ...

Yet while the cost is high the rewards are far greater. St Paul can say, “Therefore, since through God's mercy we have this ministry, we do not lose heart.” (2 Cor 4:1)

In today's Gospel reading we see how little is expected for so great a reward. Did you know that anyone who receives you, receives Jesus and anyone who receives Jesus receives the Father as well? If you are willing to meet the most insignificant need of a disciple, you will receive the same reward as the disciple.

Let me tell you two stories.

Ravi Zacharias was in hospital recovering from an attempt at suicide. He had come to the point in his teenage years that life was not worth living and he had decided to give up.

While in hospital a man unknown to Ravi came and gave him a New Testament. Through reading that Ravi came to see that there was hope in this life: a purpose for living now which would lead to spending eternity with God. Ravi's life was transformed, and he became one of the great apologists for the Christian Faith of our time. He kept in touch with the man who gave him the Bible and went to see him just before the man died. “I was put on this earth to give you that Bible,” He said to Ravi. We know little of the man's life and certainly he never became famous. But one small act of kindness to a despairing young man will mean that he will receive that young man's reward.

Stephen Longu is an African evangelist who spoke at our Church in BeachHaven. Stephen was abandoned by his mother as a young boy and brought up by relatives who did not want him. He ended up sleeping rough and scavenging in restaurant rubbish cans for food. Recruited by terrorist group he was trained to disrupt kill and destroy. He hated white people and did all he could to destroy them. One night his gang went to a revival meeting held in a large marquee with the intention of blowing it up. He and his gang arrived early and so they decide to go in and wait. The service got under way and when the preacher spoke Stephen felt as if all his sins were being made public. His fellow terrorist was about to attack Steven because he thought that Stephen had told his story to the preacher. He too was hearing his sins listed. Stephen eventually felt compelled to go forward even before the preacher finished. His conversion and subsequent story are well worth reading. But it is what happened after that I want to focus on. A man who was an Oxford Don gave up his academic career to go to Africa as a missionary. He opened a school for boys and took Stephen under his wing. For fifteen years he and others turned this illiterate young man with no knowledge of how to live in a house or sleep in a bed into the confident preacher we saw at our church here on the North Shore of Auckland NZ.

It wasn't a cup of cold water: it was how to use a knife and fork. It wasn't a kind word or a few moments of time: it was years of patiently restoring all that Stephen had been deprived of. Yet this man Hannes Joubert

shared his life completely so that Stephen could be transformed into the man he is today. As a result many thousand have heard the Gospel and have come to believe. Hannes Joubert will receive his reward.

Jesus said, "I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did to Me." (Matt 25: 40)

Through Abraham's trust in God we are here today. All who have come to know love and obey Jesus are children of Abraham. None of this would have been possible without the depth of trust that he exercised so many millennia ago.

And now it is our turn. Will you listen to the voice of God and then obey it? No matter whether the action is large or small, you have no idea how God will use your obedience to bless many. It may not be the great trial that Abraham went through, but whatever the Lord is asking you to do, OBEY.

Early in the morning Abraham went.....

And the whole of heaven echoed the words of Jesus,

"Well done good and faithful servant....." (Matt 25:21)