

Sermon
7 Pentecost, Proper 8, Year A
29 June, 2008
The Rev. Carrie Schofield-Broadbent
Called to the Edge of Reason

When I first looked at our lectionary readings this week, I looked at the Gospel lesson first. I thought. Great! I'll preach about hospitality, it's so important in the Christian life, I know some good stories I'll use...

Then, I took a look at the Old Testament reading and saw the story known as the near sacrifice of Isaac. Yeah. I feel like I can't let this intense story just sit out there with out preaching about it.

It must be said right off the bat, that any attempts to tame this story do a disservice to the Scripture. Any attempts to explain away or ignore the emotional depth of this story, and attempts to smooth over such an incredible story, would be inauthentic.

This story of Abraham almost sacrificing his own son is not a tame story. This story is fundamentally disturbing. And it leaves me with far more questions than it does answers.

The question that seems to be hooking me the most this time I engage the story is: *Why would the community of faith hold on to such a gruesome story?* That's how scripture was formed. No big hand came down from the sky and chiseled the Holy Scriptures into tablets, rather it was the community of faith that stretches across the generations that have held these stories as meaningful, helpful, and sacred, that have taught them to their children and their children's children. And eventually, groups have sat down and decided which of those stories should be included in the Bible.

Why would the community of faith hold on to such a gruesome story? We'll never know for sure, of course, but my musings about that have led me to a few guesses. This story is very much about the power of God. This is a story of a demanding God, a wild, uncontrollable, unpredictable God. And only a God that that demands such wild things from us could love with such a fierce, unbridled passion.

It reminds me of a quote I remember from the book *Salvation on Sand Mountain*¹, which happens to be a journalist's account of his time spent with an Appalachian Christian congregation that practiced snake handling as a spiritual practice. I'm reminded of this wild, demanding God when he writes, **“Feeling after God is a dangerous business, and Christianity without passion, danger, and mystery my not be Christianity at all.”**

¹ *Salvation on Sand Mountain: Snake-Handling and Redemption in Southern Appalachia* (Paperback) by [Dennis Covington](#) (Author)

Perhaps the community of faith wanted to preserve this story about a God who calls us to the edge of reason. Even though many of us have not had the same experience as Abraham, many of us have felt called to the edge of reason by this wild, unpredictable God.

Have you ever felt called to the edge of reason? Have you ever been asked to endure something you never thought you'd have the strength to endure? Have you ever felt called to meet a challenge you felt unprepared for? Have you ever been called out of the familiar into the unknown? Have you ever felt called to leave something precious behind or take up something scary? I'm not sure if any one else has been asked to lay down our son on the altar of God, but many of us know what it's like to be called to the edge of reason by this wild, uncontrollable God.

Perhaps the community of the faithful has preserved this story because just at the edge of reason, God shows mercy and kindness, blessings and promises. Maybe we need this story to reassure us when we feel like we're at the edge of reason that mercy and blessings will abound.

God, wild, passionate, uncontrollable, merciful God,
Give us strength when you call us to the edge of reason.
Help us when we are called to lay on the altar those things which we hold dear,
which we cling to.

Take away from us that which needs to be surrendered, sacrificed.
Take away from us fear, pride, resentments, self-doubt.
Be with us as we lay those things on the altar.

Wild God, be with us as we lay before you other things that are precious to us: our loved ones, our gifts, our passions, our time, our service.

Pour your grace upon our offerings.
Help turn even those things for your purpose.

God of disturbing grace,
Help us to love you and serve you above all else and when that's scary, and when that hurts, reassure us how much you love us. AMEN