

**Fifth Sunday after Pentecost
June 28, 2026**

250 years of God Providing

Rev. Will Morris

**Grace Episcopal Church, Stanardsville, VA
Piedmont Episcopal Church, Madison, VA**

[Genesis 22:1-14](#)

A number of you may be wondering who is this person standing in for the wonderful Rev Becki, so perhaps a brief introduction. I was born and raised in Liverpool, England; I followed my father into the law; but then took a different turn, coming to Charlottesville for a year of law school. There – as my mother had tearfully predicted before I left – I met Michelle, whom I married in the University Chapel in 1990. We moved to DC, then Arlington, where I worked at the US Treasury on tax policy before joining GE in 2000.

Years later in London, where Michelle and I had moved with our three girls, I reconnected with my old college chaplain and returned to the path toward ordination that I'd first considered but decided against at college. After studying theology at night, I was ordained deacon at St Paul's Cathedral in 2009 and priest on July the Fourth 2010, while continuing at GE and serving at St Martin-in-the-Fields. In 2019, working for PwC, we returned to DC, and I joined St John's, Lafayette Square, again part time. I thought I was joining a sleepy church to cover faith and work issues, but a visit involving a president and a bible changed all that in June 2020...

But why am I here – in this exact spot? Well, almost 40 years ago as students Michelle and I would drive through Albemarle, Greene, and Madison counties, dreaming of a cabin in the foothills of the Blue Ridge. Two years ago, that dream finally became reality in our house on Ruth Road in Madison. Worth waiting for. So, that's me. Ok... now the sermon.

I have always loved the story of Abraham. In the readings a couple of weeks ago we had the start of his journey where he and his father and brother leave Ur and go to Haran. And then when God tells him to, Abraham moves on from Haran to the Land of the Canaanites that we now call the Holy Land. He did this on the basis of faith, on the basis of what seemed like impossible promises from God. He, an old man, and his equally elderly wife, had no children. But God promised to make of him a great nation – a founding father, if you will. So, fueled only by faith and trust, Abraham went. And now, in this story, God tests Abraham's faith again. Go, take your only, your beloved son, he says, and the only means through which Abraham could become the father of the promised great nation, and sacrifice him – a human sacrifice to God – on Mount Moriah. And once again, Abraham, though surely distraught, obeys God, trusts God, believes God will provide though he can't see how. And that faith is rewarded. Isaac is not sacrificed, the ram caught in the thicket is. And God renews his promise: "I will make your offspring as numerous as the stars of heaven, and the sand that is on the seashore."

While I have to tell you that God has whispered no such promises in my ears – nor asked me to sacrifice my own children – I do have some understanding of what it took Abraham to find that faith, that trust. When I came here almost 40 years ago, I knew no one. When Michelle and I married and I settled here,

when I took citizenship, I was leaving behind family, friends, familiarity, and, to some extent, advantage, to set out on a new journey. It is a journey that everyone who has ever come to this country has had to make, crossing an ocean, leaving a homeland and family, but we all, or our forebears at some point, made the decision to take that leap – that leap towards something hopeful – but a leap of faith, nevertheless. The same leap Abraham had to keep on making.

In my case it was faith in the openness of this country; faith in its optimism; faith in its opportunity. Put simply, I believed – and continue to believe – in America. A belief that is underpinned by a remarkable system of government and governance summed up in that Declaration whose 250th anniversary we celebrate on Saturday. A document which expressed, and still expresses, a founding principle, an idea, that has, so far, been inextinguishable. A belief expressed in a single sentence – which I make no apology for quoting in full – “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.” There in those 35 words is that optimism, openness and opportunity that I sensed almost 40 years ago.

But equally, love this country though I do, I will not, cannot, pretend that it is perfect, or that it lives up to Jefferson’s sentence every single day. Which is why I want to come back to Abraham and Isaac. Because I believe that God believes in America, as he believed in Abraham. Abraham was being asked by God to do something impossibly difficult; to kill his only son, his beloved son, a human being made in the image of God. But that in fact, was not what God intended. God was testing Abraham’s faith the better to make the point that if we have faith, are faithful, then God will provide. But to make that clear he had to bring Abraham to the very edge of the abyss. This was not going to be a cozy chat with God over a cup of tea, which Abraham would have forgotten by the next day. No, this was to be seared in Abraham’s mind for ever – trust God, have faith, even though the way to you may not be clear – and he will provide.

And isn’t that the same with America? Have we not seen that time and again in our own young history when God has tested us, our faith, by asking us to do impossibly difficult things, things that seem like they might destroy us? To go to the ends of the earth to defend freedom in two world wars? To nurture that freedom and liberty at great economic cost. And most notably to act at home against injustice at the risk of tearing our country apart. In the constitution which provides for the enduring system of governance that underpins the life and liberty we still enjoy, there was also a founding sin. That of enslavement, of treating other human beings as goods, as inferior, as property to be traded, sold, and often mistreated. To correct that wrong took a ghastly Civil War and then a further century to work through, but in the end, relying, like Abraham, on faith, believing that God will provide, our nation succeeded. God believed in America, and we showed that we had faith in him; just as God believed in Abraham, and Abraham had faith in God.

But there’s one other resonance from the story of Abraham that is profoundly relevant. For Abraham, and for us, God provides the ram in the thicket. But we also need to remember that what God did not require of Abraham, he did require of himself. That last human sacrifice – that of his son, Jesus Christ. Jesus is for us that ultimate ram caught in the thicket. The God who died that we might live. It is that death which immeasurably strengthens the faith that the writer of the letter to the Hebrews talks about: “Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.” Through Abraham, God made a promise to the whole world: “by your offspring shall all the nations of the earth gain blessing for themselves.” Abraham’s blessing is, as St Paul reminds us time and again, our blessing, too. And this is the God who, particularly through his son, has revealed what he hopes for from us as a sign of our faith: to love our neighbor as ourself; to bring good news to the poor, release to the captives, recovery of sight to the blind, and to let the oppressed go free. And that reiteration the night before he

died, when Our Lord says to the disciples, “I give you a new commandment, love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another.”

This new commandment continues the progression that we see with Abraham, where God’s loving purpose is revealed slowly, step by step. But whatever God’s purposes, we, of course, are humans, and we can mess things up – sometimes really badly. And I know many feel that right now. But amidst the gloom I continue to sense that openness, that optimism and that opportunity are still there, ready to reemerge, **if** we have the faith that Abraham had when asked to sacrifice his son and his entire future. I simply do not believe our best days are behind us, and that things will just get worse and worse. That is profoundly un-Christian, because however bad things might seem in the present, if we have faith in God’s love and Jesus’ death and resurrection, then – as they were for Abraham and Isaac – then our best days are still before us.

So, hold on to that, because it’s what drew me and so many others here. And it is the promise still, 250 years in, that we can offer to our neighbours, to those we are called upon to love across this whole wide amazing world that our Lord God has created. Amen.