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Sept 14, 2025
Genesis 21:1-7; 22:1-18

“I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.” Philippians 4:13

“Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil; for you are with me...” Psalm 23:4

“The Lord is my rock, my fortress, and my deliverer, my God, my rock in whom I take refuge...” Psalm 18:2

“God calls us into the church to accept the cost and joy of discipleship...” The UCC Statement of Faith

“I believe in the Holy Spirit, the One Holy Universal Christian Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins....” The Apostles’ Creed.

These are the words that you and us and we have been hearing since August 3. Scriptures and testimonies that have shaped our faith for nearly 3,000 years.

These are not just words to hear on a Sunday and say “Oh, isn’t that nice.” But words to hear and hold onto when we enter dark valleys, when a single bullet can take one life, when a Body of Christ can become divided over a dialogue.

It does not matter if you can do all things through Christ...until you find yourself afraid.

The need for comfort is easily taken for granted until you feel in need of a Good Shepherd.

No one knows what it means for God to be a steady, ever-present rock until everything and every place seems unsteady and unsafe.

What good is a Creed or Statement of Faith if the moment enemies raise their head or evil is known, we act as if all hope is gone?

These sacred words we read are not just fleeting thoughts or poetry; these words were composed by survivors, folks who knew what it is to like to live, lose, strive, fall down and get back up.

Everything we have shared here leads us to a moment like today. A time in history that is messy. People with conflicting thoughts, spirits wounded, wanting the Balm of Gilead to make it all go away.

But that is not life. So we find the Sacred where we are, and in what we are going through.

If this week’s events brought tears to your eyes, God is in those tears.

If the events of this week made you feel scared, God is in that fear. If they made you feel angry, God is in that anger.

Those tears, anger, fears are sacred, because they are yours.

They are yours to give to God, offer to Christ, send forth to the Spirit.

This morning we heard 2 readings that deal with things we dealt with all week- life and loss; comfort and violence.

At one moment we have the matriarch of our faith, Sarah, finally having the child she had been promised decades before.

All that Sarah and her husband had been through- leaving their native land, traveling far, facing war, and waiting...

Then finally (endlich), Sarah gives birth to her first and only child. She names him Isaac, which means "Laughter"; "He laughs."

This brings Sarah joy; she celebrates the laughter. After all the loss, trials and mistakes, there is laughter in her life.

But then...in Genesis 22 God tells Abraham to take Sarah's one and only child and sacrifice him upon a hill. As far as we know, Abraham discussed nothing with his wife, he expresses no concern about her.

In what can feel like extreme cruelty, he takes her child "Laughter" and is willing to kill him for his beliefs.

This is a scripture that has shaped so many lives, influenced so much faith, but it holds great challenges.

Do we really think God would make such a request? Do you believe God would ask a Dad to kill a boy named Laughter?

How could God expect Sarah to experience the pain of childbirth and the heartbreak of death?

Why didn't Abraham fight for his son? Why didn't he stand up to God and say "Not my son," in the same way he stood up for Sodom in Genesis 18?

Abraham bargains with God for the sake of 50, 30, 10 people, yet he does not bargain for his own kin. What if God wanted to see if Abraham would do the same for his son? What if God wanted to see Abraham challenge God and wrestle with the uncomfortable?

These 2 scriptures remind us of the complexity of life and of our faith.

We witness the laughter and the horror that co-exist side by side.

We are reminded that in life there is happiness and tribulations.

The Bible never shies away from this; the Bible never has. Today's text shows the sweet and the sour; the joy and pain of life.

Good, solid faith, and good, solid churches do not shy away either.

We come here from all of our lived experiences. We share, we hear, we are reminded of the Rock we stand upon, the shepherd who leads us, and how Christ strengthens us so we can do all things.

Things have been uneasy for folk since Wednesday.

This is why what we as a church does matters. Why playing a role in transforming lives matter.

This is why places like Camp Moval, why programs like Confirmation, why ministries like Feed My People matter.

Because they remind us of the goodness of God, they remind us of the heritage we stand upon, they remind us of the importance of giving to, giving back, lifting up.

Though this has been a week of many emotions, it is also a time of opportunities.

To discuss, to come together, to stand upon the Lord, our Rock.

To remember that no matter the darkness of the valley, the light of the Lord can see us through.

To remember that just as the Apostles and ancestors who came before faced hard times and held onto their trust in Jesus, we can to.

Amen.