

What have we learned -

no, what have we remembered about God on this night?

First, we remembered that God made us.

However it happened,

whether it was like how Genesis told it,

or how Genesis re-told it,

or how Fr. Rhett & James Weldon Johnson RE-retold it...

or whether it was how chapter 1 of John's Gospel tells it,

(In the beginning was the Word...)

or how the choir sang a re-telling of John's gospel,

(and the Word and the Word and the Word was...)

or whether it was like science's best understanding so far

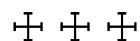
of a Really Big Bang...

However it happened, we remember tonight that God MADE you.

That there was nothing and then there was YOU

and that it happened because God's first act of creation

was an act of love.



Then we remembered what kind of God it is who made us:  
a God who will never ask us to kill our children.

Maybe that seems obvious, but history and current events tell us  
it's a lesson we still desperately need learn:  
God will never desire the sacrifice, the death, of our children.

The binding of Isaac is a powerful story, an unsettling story.  
It defies capture.

But at its heart the binding of Isaac is a teaching from God  
that is so important God taught it at the very beginning,  
taught it through the very first family  
of this people he was calling into being,  
and THEN he taught it twice.<sup>1</sup>

First, God taught it in the story we heard tonight,  
when his angel cried out to stop Abraham from killing Isaac,  
and then God taught it a second time  
when his angel cried out again,  
this time to stop Hagar from abandoning her son Ishmael  
in the desert.

Our God, your God - the true and only God -  
does not and will never ask us to sacrifice children in his name.  
Not then, not now, not ever.

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<sup>1</sup> Special thanks to Marilynne Robinson's new book, Reading Genesis, pgs. 117-121.

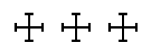
What God does instead...is save us.

Over and over and over,  
in ways we never expect,  
like he saved Isaac, like he saved Ishmael,  
like he saved the people who fled Egypt.

When it seems like there is nowhere else to go,  
God makes a path out of the sea,  
God make a way out of no way.

The story of the people walking on dry land  
through the heart of the Red Sea is the key to understanding  
all the stories before it and all the stories that follow.

Because God saves even when it seems like salvation is impossible.



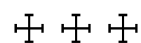
We remembered In Ezekiel that God doesn't just save us from physical death  
but from spiritual death, too.

God saves us from uncleanness,  
from the rot that infects our souls and calcifies our hearts.

And since God knows that isolation is the most powerful source of that rot,  
over and over and over God calls us back together. God calls us home.

Of all the promises God makes in the Hebrew scriptures,  
I think my favorite is when God says,

“I will remove your heart of stone  
and give you back a heart of flesh.”



We also remember tonight that God's power to save  
is so overwhelming, so creative,  
that not even a graveyard is beyond God's power to save.

“Mortal, can these bones live?”  
“O Lord God, you know.”

Tonight we ALL know the answer:

With God, nothing is impossible,  
not creating life where before there was nothing,  
not saving children from death,  
not saving a whole people when there's nowhere else to run,  
not restoring our own hearts when they seem hard and brittle,  
not creating beautiful, lush life from a valley of bones.

Over and over and over, in ways we never expect, God saves.

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And if the passage through the Red Sea is THE foundational story,  
then we are about to remember the ULTIMATE story,  
the ultimate example of what God has always done  
and continues to do.

Save us. Cleanse us. Raise us from death.

God did not desire the sacrifice of Isaac or Ishmael  
because the only blood sacrifice TO God would be given BY God -  
given once, and for all eternity.

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On this night God Incarnate moves from death into life,  
and on this night God Incarnate takes us with him.

Never forget, sisters and brothers, never forget.

God saves us over and over and over. This is simply what God does.

Never forget.

This is why we prayed tonight WITH those who have preceded us in death.

This is why, when we have died,

we will join in prayer from beyond the grave

with those who follow after us.

Never forget.

This is why a bunch of stiff-necked Americans need to hear the story

of a father & a mother halfway around the world and 4,000 years ago

who both learned that God -

the ULTIMATE power, the ULTIMATE authority, the ULTIMATE truth -

will never call on us to sacrifice our children.

And so we should never do it to ourselves.

Never forget.

This is why a bunch of sophisticated, 21st c. Episcopalians

have to remember about a group of people running for their lives

3,500 years ago, and what God did for them

when there was nowhere else to run.

We have to remember that God is the God of us all

because God desires not death, but life.

Because God saves.

And because this, this is the night.

Amen.