

[Genesis 22:1-14](#)

[Psalm 13](#)

[Romans 6:12-23](#)

[Matthew 10:40-42](#)

Good morning. I wanted to begin this morning by introducing myself. My name is Kaity Reece, and I am one of the seminarians who is being sponsored by St. Martha's. This past year, my spouse and daughter have continued to be active members of St. Martha's while I completed an internship here locally, and I am back home at St. Martha's for the summer. I appreciate the opportunity to worship with you and for Mother Emily's invitation to preach this morning.

Last week, on my first Sunday back with St. Martha's, Mother Emily preached about struggling with challenging scripture passages. We heard Jesus preach that families would turn against each other, son against father, and mother against daughter. This week, we have another family drama that is also difficult to wrestle with, the story of the binding of Isaac. Just as we cannot discard the passage from Matthew last week, we turn now to the challenging story of the binding of Isaac.

This story is important to the Christian, Muslim, and Jewish traditions. Just this week, the Muslim community worldwide celebrated Eid (Aye-eed al ad-ha) al-Adha, the second most important holiday in Islam. Indeed, this holiday marks the end of the annual Haj or pilgrimage to Mecca.

Adha means sacrifice in Arabic, and this major religious holiday commemorates the willingness of Abraham to sacrifice either Isaac or Ishmael, according to the Quranic tradition. Eid al-Adha is celebrated with the ritual sacrifice of a lamb or goat, recalling the ram that God—or whom Muslims call Allah—provided Abraham in recognition of Abraham's faithfulness. In this celebration, families share a meal and distribute leftovers to the poor and needy.

In the Jewish tradition, the binding of Isaac is known as the Akedah (aah-keh-dah) The Akedah is traditionally read during the Days of Awe, a ten-day period between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur.

Early Christians drew on the story of Isaac to draw parallels between Isaac and the execution and resurrection of Jesus.

Despite these shared roots, when we read the story of Isaac in the twenty-first century, it is hard for us to imagine sacrificing a child.

We wonder what this story could mean for us, today.

In light of last week's story in the Gospel of Matthew about family division and strife and our story today about the binding of Isaac, I invite us to think about how families and communities can hurt AND heal.

We never hear what Isaac thought of his father's attempted sacrifice in the mountains. Isaac's voice is silent for several chapters, beginning with his binding and continuing through his marriage to Rebekah. It is as if these actions are happening to him, and Isaac is a passenger along for the ride. While it was common for the patriarch—in this case, Abraham—to arrange a marriage for his son, when Isaac and Rebekah meet, we hear Rebekah's voice, not Isaac's. Indeed, it is not until the death of Abraham do we hear directly from Isaac. When Rebekah joins the family, the writers of Genesis say that Isaac took Rebekah into his mother Sarah's tent, and Rebekah became his wife. This seems to suggest that Isaac was living not with his father but with his mother. Even at the time of Isaac's death, Rebekah—not Isaac—determines

which of her twin sons will receive the father's blessing and inheritance.

Is it possible that Isaac was among the walking wounded, and the events we read about today never quite left Isaac?

Perhaps you have experienced rejection or loss within your family or can relate to painful family separation. Certainly, my family has experienced painful family separation. Maybe you find yourself troubled by events that happened to you in your childhood and struggle to explain them to others. Perhaps you carry with you the scars from leaving a faith community that hurt you, forcing you to leave a faith tradition that you once called home. Families and communities can and do hurt us.

In light of Isaac's story, I want to tell you about the tens of thousands of forced migrants who flee persecution and the threat of death each year because of who they are and who they love. In at least seventy countries, it is illegal to live and love as a member of the LGBTQ community. Many LGBTQ migrants faced physical abuse, violence, and the risk of death because of their sexual orientation or gender identity. LGBTQ-forced migrants face many challenges. They are less likely to qualify for benefits that many other forced migrants like refugees are eligible for, and they can face continued discrimination among their

own diaspora community here in the United States, who continue to reject them because of who they love. Religion has often been used as a weapon to justify the violence against them. These are people who have been hurt by their families and their communities.

Families and communities can also offer healing. The early followers of Jesus, having experienced the rejection of their families of origin that we heard about in Matthew's Gospel last week, created a new family as siblings in Christ. We hear in the Genesis story that Isaac found love in his relationship with Rebekah and that Rebekah was a comfort to him when his mother, Sarah, died.

Maybe you have found healing in a new faith tradition or worked hard to find new ways of being a family, ensuring that generational trauma ends with you. Perhaps you have welcomed others to join you in creating a new family based on love and acceptance, not fear, rejection, and pain.

Today's Gospel invites us to participate in the radical welcome of God's love, which is offered to everyone without exceptions. At the last General Convention, our national church passed a resolution recognizing the need to support and welcome forced migrants fleeing

physical violence and persecution because of who they are and who they love. The National Church has created a pilot program called the Rainbow Initiative to support congregations and other communities who want to share hope and healing with those seeking sanctuary because of their sexual orientation or gender identity. This support can be offered through prayer, education, stewardship, or community sponsorship. The Benedictine Way, a new Episcopal monastic movement in the Diocese of Nebraska, is one such partner.

We can offer places of healing and restoration because we ourselves have experienced healing and restoration, in our families, in our communities, and above all, in the Resurrection of Jesus, which offers new life and hope to each of us. Through Jesus's life, death, and resurrection, we are united together as siblings in Christ and reminded that no one falls outside the loving embrace of God. We are called to act as Christ's hands and feet in this world, ensuring that all are welcome at this table.

As we think about those who have been hurt or rejected by their own families or communities, we are encouraged to practice this welcome, remembering Jesus's promise that "Whoever welcomes you welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me."

Sermon Manuscript, Kaity Reece
St. Martha's Episcopal Church, Papillion

Amen.