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West Valley Presbyterian Church
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Thanksgiving Sunday - AKA: Provider

When I was young and we would celebrate Thanksgiving we had so many pastors in our family that *everyone* wanted to pray over the meal.

When I went to other gatherings to celebrate Thanksgiving the question was always posed "Who is saying Grace?" and everyone would slink down in their seats and looked away.

But in our family it was quite the opposite. Everyone was eager to say grace because they were into that sort of thing...but my grandfather usually ended up doing it because he was sort of hyper and he'd start praying right away before anyone else could begin.

If I was sitting next to him, which I usually was, he'd grab my hand and plunge into the prayer..."Oh great God...provider of all good things, we thank you for your provisions," and he would go on and on and on thanking God for his provision. He used the word "Provider" over and over again in these very lengthy Thanksgiving prayers.

It wouldn't have been so bad if it hadn't been for the fact that my grandfather had won the lightweight boxing championship at the University of Illinois back in the day...and his fingers were the size of small logs...the strength in his boxing hands was intense.

He'd grab my hand, and I'd go into a trance because of the pain...the only thing I remember is him using the word "provide" OR "provider" over and over. ... It wasn't that I wasn't praying...I was...I was praying for God to provide as well... provide circulation, and an end to "the grace".

Well, we do talk about God as Provider at Thanksgiving a lot – in fact in the hymn at the start of the service one of the verses says “**God our Maker will provide**”. Scripture also talks about God as Provider...but does anyone know where in Scripture God is first referred to as **PROVIDER**?

In the story we read this morning. It didn't take that much courage to come out with that one... *You had a good chance of getting that one right.*

Abraham calls God “**Jehovah Jireh**” on Mt Moriah meaning “**God will provide**”. I want to put this name for God as Provider in the proper context. So let me just walk you through the story of Abraham and Isaac for a moment and together we will explore the way in which God is provider for Abraham and for us as well.

It all began when Abraham heard the call to go to the land of Canaan and so he went. God promised to make him the father of the nations and he believed and left and went to strange land at God's command.

⁸By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going. Hebrews 11:8

That took a lot of faith. Of course... That was *before* Lot took the best land. That was *before* the king of Egypt took his wife. That was *before* he found out that he, the father of the nations, was married to a barren woman. Everything happened to him to make him doubt God's promise, to discourage him. Everything happened to make Abraham doubt, and cause him to think that God's promise could never be fulfilled in his life.

Does that ever happen to you?
God gives you hope for something, a vision, a sense of purpose, a call...you have a sense in prayer that God wants you

to follow through on something but then everything happens to discourage you;

To make you think that God's promises to you, his love for you, his plan and purpose for you, his provision for you in these ways... couldn't possibly happen - that what you had hoped and prayed about, what you felt led or called to do will never occur.

1. **Keep on believing in God's plan and promises to you NO MATTER WHAT HAPPENS. God is a faithful provider and will come through.**

Abraham had been told by God that he would have son, but nothing happened...for the longest time and Abraham got very old...

He qualified for the Senior Discount on everything,

And then when he was ninety years old...Abraham got another message from God - it was the same one - that he would have a son

When Sarah heard about that she thought it was so preposterous that Sarah who had never had a child, even in her prime, laughed. And Abraham laughed too.

Frederick Buechner writes about this laugh; that it was probably a cynical, angry laugh - the kind of laugh that comes from someone who has been disappointed too many times.

Ever hear that kind of a laugh from someone? I have.

It comes from people who have hoped for too long and given up hoping, expecting, anticipating anything good.

They laugh in that way... because...its just been too hard for too long...

That's what it was like for Abraham and Sarah...too hard for too long...and hope was pretty much gone..

And then...guess what?

A few years later...Isaac is born to this now century old couple; God's promise is fulfilled... and there's Abraham...

Can you see him?

Bouncing his first-born on his hundred-year-old bony knees?

So they name this little son...and they name their son so that they will never forget God's faithful provision again...

The name they give their son is the name Isaac...ISAAC MEANS LAUGHTER (IMAGE...**The name Isaac means laughter**)

Abraham and Sarah name their child laughter! Any one here have a kid named laughter?

Joy comes pretty close to it. Any one have the name of Joy out there? Or anyone named Isaac?

Well, this name laughter was an irony, right?

Every time they called their little toddler "Laughter" they were reminded of how they had doubted God's promise by *laughing cynically*...

And every time they called "Laughter! Come over here" there was their little boy..toddling toward their outstretched wrinkled arms...smiling, cooing, and enjoying every minute of their love...

So they were reminded, every time they called their sons name... of Jehovah Jireh who always comes through on his promises..who always provides

But...the irony is too that this child was the joy of their life This child of promise brought them true laughter, as every child does.

So often the work of God (I've seen it over and over again) takes our cynicism and doubt (that always stems from hurt and disappointment) and turns that cynicism and doubt to heartfelt joy and delight.

When we start to hope again, and turn away from despair
When we start to actually have expectation for the future -
that's the work of God..

But then the worst thing happens. Issac, LAUGHTER, must have been about 8-11 years old maybe..

God tested Abraham. He said to him, "Abraham!"

"Here I am," he replied.

Then God said, "Take your son, your only son, Isaac, LAUGHTER, whom you love, (the promise fulfilled, the joy of your life, the one you waited for to be born for so long...a century...)and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him (LAUGHTER) there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains I will tell you about" ([Genesis 22:1-2](#) NIV).

They go on a three day journey...and then up that mountain they go. Same mountain range as where Jesus was crucified, some Biblical scholars think.

And you get it don't you...the parallel between this story and God giving us his son, his only son, whom he loved...this is a foreshadowing of something that was to happen thousands of years later that would bring salvation to all humanity...

Abraham didn't know that then. Never did. But from our vantage point we see how God is working out his redemption story from the *beginning of time*.

2. God is doing a whole lot more in our lives than we will ever know this side of heaven. (That's why sometimes we can get confused. We don't get the big picture in our three or four score and ten. We are part of a much bigger story than we have any idea...We can see that Abraham certainly was from our vantage point today)

The next thing I want you to notice here is **how** Abraham managed to get through this test.

If you read this account in scripture, you will notice that you only hear from Isaac one sentence in this whole story...and it is a heart rending question that he asks Abraham as they go up the mountain together...

Laughter speaks up and says to his Dad, "Father?"

"Yes, my son?" Abraham replied.

"The fire and wood are here," Laughter says, "but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?" ([Genesis 22:7](#)).

You wonder how the words make it past the lump in Abraham's throat.

Abraham answered, "God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son." And the two of them went on together ([Genesis 22:8](#)).

You can also translate this particular passage this way..."**God will provide himself for the burnt offering/sacrifice my son,**" which many have suggested is a direct prophetic statement of Jesus being the ultimate sacrifice for the sins of the world." God will provide himself, for the offering, in Jesus.

I have preached on this passage many times, and sometimes folks have come up to me afterward and said, "I don't like that passage...its all about child abuse and I just can't deal with that."

Just to clarify...All through the history of the Jewish people, the Hebrews were the only ones in that ancient time who never engaged in child sacrifice. Everyone else, all the pagan religions around them at different times for different reasons did offer children in sacrifice. The Jewish people never did. It was an abomination to the Lord.

Of course Abraham lived before the Jews ever came into being. Issac, Laughter, was the beginning of that nation. But here God was requesting something of Abraham that was an abomination to him - to God - to see if Abraham would still trust him, even if he appeared to be a monster, to be brutal and abusive. Will you still trust me Abraham?

Abraham does trust God, but how does he do it? He remembered...

Hudson Taylor, founder of China Inland Mission, use to hang in his home a plaque with two Hebrew words on it: **EBENEEZER** and **JEHOVAH JIREH**. The first word means "**Up until now the Lord has helped us.**" The second word means, "**The Lord will provide.**" One looked back remembering, while the other looked forward. One plaque reminded him of God's faithfulness in the past, the other of God Provision for the future based on who he knew God to be.

And Abraham looked at this little son **LAUGHTER**. And he remembered how he cynically laughed before and distrusted what God told him, thinking that this child would *never be born*. How he had doubted and become so negative about his future. How as his body had withered in old age, so had his hope in God.

And Abraham remembered this, and how **LAUGHTER** came to him anyway...How God had been faithful and provided...So **THIS TIME** Abraham decided that he would trust God for the future anyway...no matter how draconian the request, or how evil God looked in the moment...he was going to trust God . He knew that God would provide. Hebrew 11:17-18 states it this way,

"By faith Abraham, when God tested him, offered Isaac as a sacrifice. He who had embraced the promises was about to sacrifice his one and only son, ¹⁸ even though God had said to him, "It is through Isaac that your offspring will be blessed."^[c] ¹⁹ Abraham reasoned that God could even raise the dead..."

He had learned from his past experience with God that nothing, absolutely nothing, was impossible with God. He didn't know how God would do it, but *this time* because he remembered, he trusted in Gods provision"

3. When you have trouble trusting God to provide for the future, remember his provision to you in the past.

Rest of the story...

Abraham tied up his son, **LAUGHTER**, and placed him on the altar and raised the knife to slay him.

And the angel called out to him, "Abraham! Abraham! Don't lay a finger on that boy...don't you dare touch him.

Abraham had proven his faith in God. He hears a rustling in the thicket and turns and sees a ram caught in a bush by his horns.

He offered it as an offering and gave the mountain a name: **Jehovah-jireh — The Lord Provides.**

4. God often provides at the very last minute.

God often gives you the ticket right before you get on the train...even as the train is slowly pulling out of the station at the last possible minute when you can still jump on.

One classic preacher put it this way...

At the last moment, never before it, never until we have found out how much we need it, and never too late, comes the Helper.

I went around this past week asking all of you...do you have a story about provision? About God providing? I need a story for my Thanksgiving sermon. At the last minute God provided...last night...this story came in.....From a person I'd been praying for, for a really long time that I wasn't expecting to hear from-This person wishes to remain anonymous but regularly attends WVPC...I have changed a few words in telling this to you...

Dear Pastor Kim – I am sure this is way too late for you to use...(well *the train was pulling out of the station but it just made it*) I have been busy...but here is my story.

My 13 year old daughter died 3 years ago in 2009. After this devastating loss, I went back to work after 6 months...but it was difficult emotionally. Then, I was laid off last November 15th, 2011.

I spent the year on unemployment and looking for a job while I stayed home with my son. I worried if I got a new job that I wouldn't be able to cope. So I kept looking for employment in limbo, no direction, no hope...just knew others were praying for me.

A few months ago my unemployment was about to run out. I started praying for "this" job and "that" job...but never asking what God wanted. I finally became desperate and started praying for "a" job..whatever the Lord would have me do, I would do. Then...

November 12th I got hired and started my new job. I had just sent in my last unemployment voucher. (*There it is...right...that last minute*

provision!) I was still feeling desperate with bills but just had to ask .. Father..please let your will be done. When I worried, I would just repeat to myself..."When in doubt, Pray it out".

Then at work, I met someone in the same capacity as me. She sits a few offices over. On Friday, she came by and we talked about work. I had an email open on my computer screen from WVPC. She asked if I attended there. I said yes. She said she attended Menlo Park Pres and knew you, Pastor Kim. She went on to share that she had lost her mother in July of this year to an unexpected stroke.

We cried at my desk. I had been afraid to let anyone at work know about the loss of my daughter. It's just been too hard and I had been judged by others for my sadness. In our conversation...this woman wondered how I could understand her loss. So, I shared about my daughter and shared her picture.

At that moment, we connected in Christ. I don't think I will ever be the same. Love lifted me that day.. I know the Lord will walk with me each day. I know now that, no matter what or where, God will PROVIDE...provide for us financially, emotionally and one day at a time.

Do you see how God did a whole lot more than just answering a prayer for a job? He connected this woman to someone who knew Jesus who had also experienced a loss and gave her a friend, and lifted her spirits. God provides for our needs in ways we don't even think about.

Jehovah-Jireh...God will provide for your life too.

Keep on trusting. God doesn't work on our time frame and he loves a cliff hanger, so that when the miracle happens we will know that it was him.

This Thanksgiving as we celebrate God's provision of food and family and time together...***you will now know where the term God as Provider first came from in Scripture.***

Please also remember that the greatest Provision ever made by God himself was on a cross outside the city of Jerusalem...

Abraham called that place The LORD Will Provide. And to this day it is said, "On the mountain of the LORD it will be provided" ([Genesis 22:14](#))

On a lonely Mount outside the city.. the Lord provided for us in his son, his only son, his son whom he loved as a sacrifice for the sins of the world, so that we could laugh today...not with cynicism at the future, but with joy and expectation and hope because our sins are forgiven and we have eternal life in our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Who is saying Grace today?

It is the cross of Jesus Christ....Jehovah-Jireh...given for us.

Amen
