



February 8, 2026

Melville United Church

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**Melville United Church
Sunday, February 8, 2026**

*Presiding: Rev. Tom Waston
Ministry of Music: Colleen Weber*

Prelude

Welcome & Announcements

Land Acknowledgement

Lighting the Christ Candle

Call to Worship

To be nurtured in faith and hope...

We have come to this house of worship.

To express our thanks for the daily grace of the living God...

We have come to this house of worship.

To reach into our souls and have them refreshed and renewed...

We have come to this house of worship.

Come...God is here among us in our worship.

Hymn — New Every Morning VU 405

1. New every morning is the love
Our waking and uprising prove;
Through sleep and darkness safely brought,
restored to life and power and thought.

2. New mercies, each returning day,
Hover around us while we pray;
New perils past, new sins forgiven,
New thoughts of God, new hopes of heaven.

3. If on our daily course our mind
Be set to hallow all we find,
New treasures still of countless price,
God will provide for sacrifice.

4. The trivial round, the common task,
Will furnish all we ought to ask:
Room to deny ourselves, a road
To bring us daily nearer God.

5. Only, O Lord, in your dear love
Fit us for perfect rest above;
And help us, this and every day,
To live more nearly as we pray.

Gathering Prayer: Holy God, we sing our hymns, not flatter you but to still the distracting noises within ourselves. We pray, not to change your will but to align our will with yours. We gather, not because we think you count our numbers, but to be strengthened by each other. Be with us, Holy God. Amen.

Hymn — The Church is Wherever God's People VU 579

1. The church is wherever God's people are praising, Singing God's goodness for joy on this day. The church is wherever disciples of Jesus Remember his story and walk in his way.
2. The church is wherever God's people are helping, Caring for neighbours in sickness and need. The church is wherever God's people are sharing The words of the Bible in gift and in deed.

Children's Time

Ministry of Music — Winter from The Four Seasons by Antonio Vivaldi (Colleen and Mercedes Weber)

Reading — Genesis 22:1-18 reader Susan Barth

When Isaac was born, his father, Abraham was 100 years old and his mother, Sarah, was 99.

Then it came to pass that God tested Abraham. God said to him, "Abraham, take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains that I shall show you."

So Abraham rose early in the morning, saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him, and his son Isaac; he cut the wood for the burnt offering, and set out and went to the place in the distance that God had shown him.

On the third day Abraham looked up and saw the place far away. Then Abraham said to his young men, "Stay here with the donkey; the boy and I will go over there; we will worship, and then we will come back to you."

Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering and laid it on his son Isaac to carry, and he himself carried the fire and the knife. So the two of them walked on together.

Isaac said to his father Abraham, "Father!" And he said, "Here I am, my son." Isaac said, "The fire and the wood are here, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?" Abraham said, "God himself will provide the lamb for a burnt offering, my son."

So the two of them walked on together. When they came to the place that God had shown him, Abraham built an altar there and laid the wood in order. He bound his son Isaac, and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood.

Then Abraham reached out his hand and took the knife to kill his son.

But the angel of the Lord called to him from heaven, and said, "Abraham, Abraham! Do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him; for now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me."

And Abraham looked up and saw a ram, caught in a thicket by its horns. Abraham went and took the ram and offered it up as a burnt offering instead of his son. So Abraham called that place "The Lord will provide"; as it is said to this day, "On the mount of the Lord it shall be provided."

The angel of the Lord called to Abraham a second time from heaven, and said, "By myself I have sworn, says the Lord: Because you have done this, and have not withheld your son, your only son, I will indeed

bless you, and I will make your offspring as numerous as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore. And your offspring shall possess the gate of their enemies, and by your offspring shall all the nations of the earth gain blessing for themselves, because you have obeyed my voice."

Sermon: Biblical Portrait: Isaac, The Story of a Survivor

The Bible was put together from material from across many centuries, and it wasn't until the 15th century that what we have today was finalized. So there are stories, legends, and ancient manuscripts that didn't make it into our Bible.

When I was doing some more reading about ancient manuscripts that didn't make it, I found the following legend.

An old, bearded shepherd with a crooked staff walked up to a stone pulpit and said, "And lo, it came to pass that the trader by the name of Abraham Com did take unto himself a young wife by the name of Dot."

And Dot Com was a comely woman—broad of shoulder and long of leg. Indeed, she had been called Amazon Dot Com. And she said unto Abraham, her husband, "Why doth thou travel far, from town to town, with thy goods, when thou can trade without even leaving thy tent?"

And Abraham did look at her as though she were several saddle bags short of a camel load, but simply said, "How, Dear?"

And Dot replied, "I will place drums in all the towns, and drums in between...to send messages saying what you have for sale...and they will reply telling you which hath the best price. And the sale can be made on the drums and delivery made by Uriah's Pony Stable, also known by its short form, UPS."

Abraham thought long and decided he would let Dot have her way with the drums. And the drums rang out and were an immediate success. Abraham sold all the goods he had, at the top price, without even moving from his tent.

And the young men of the land did take to Dot Com's trading. They were called Nomadic Ecclesiastic Rich Dominican Siderites, or NERDS for short.

And lo, the land was so feverish with joy at the new riches and the deafening sound of drums, that no one noticed that the real riches were going to the drum maker.

One, Brother William of Gates, bought up every drum company in the land...and indeed did insist on making drums that would work only if you bought Brother Gates' drumsticks. And Dot did say, "Oh, Abraham, what we have started is being taken over by others."

And as Abraham looked out over the Bay of Ezekiel, or as it came to be known "eBay," he said, "We need a name that reflects what we are," and Dot replied, "Young Ambitious Hebrew Owner Operators."

"Whoopee!" said Abraham.

"No, YAHOO!" said Dot Com.

And that is the origin of the Internet.

As I said, that story is from ancient manuscripts that didn't make it into our Bible. And it's a huge digression away from this morning's topic.

I want to talk this morning about a Biblical portrait, and will look at the story of Isaac—the son born to Abraham and Sarah when they, at 100 and 90 years old, are well past any normal sense of child-bearing age.

The Abraham saga is a critical piece in the history of the Hebrews. For it's this story that contains their understanding of *The Promised Land*—when God promises Abraham that he will be led to a land flowing with milk and honey, and there Abraham will become the ancestor of a great nation. There, in that Promised Land, God will give him as many descendants as there are stars in the heavens and grains of sand in the sea.

Now, there's no way to trace the historicity of this Abraham saga, because all of those ancient stories come from deeply steeped oral traditions. The purpose of these stories being passed on orally for countless generations was not to record history but to transmit cultural values from one generation to the next.

So historical facts became quickly garbled, events and characters were invented to serve cultural aims, and varied versions of the same stories developed among different ancient tribes.

In any event, there became steeped, deeply in the Hebrew consciousness, this notion of the Promised Land, and God's promise that from Abraham would come a great nation.

There was one little glitch in this plan. Sarah, Abraham's wife, couldn't have children. But then God tells Abraham that Sarah will give birth to a son. "This is great news, Sarah!" says Abraham.

What was Sarah's reaction? She laughed! And who wouldn't! After all, Ol' Abe was 100 and she was 99. But then, the story says, it happened. Sarah gave birth to a son. Isaac. Which means "he will laugh" or perhaps just "laughter."

I haven't been able to find any evidence of this, but I hope they had parental leave back in those days because, given that poor old Abraham was 100, I would think he would need it!

When I was in theological school at Emmanuel College in Toronto, and when it came towards the end of my third year—my graduating year—there was significant pressure from two professors for me to continue and study for a doctorate, with a view to eventually teaching at the college.

I resisted that pressure, but had I done so I would have majored in Old Testament theology. Because I was always fascinated by these old stories. Not by the stories themselves so much as why some of them were in our Bible to begin with. What was seen to be their value as scripture? What was the point behind them? What were they meant to teach us?

That's particularly the case with this morning's story. For it's the kind of story that makes me cringe when I read it. Taken at face value, I find this chilling tale morally repugnant.

- What kind of God would demand the sacrifice of one's son as the test of a man's faith?
- What kind of father would undertake to sacrifice his son in order to prove his faith in God?

There's a third question. It has to do with Isaac. We don't know how old Isaac was at this time...most commentators suggest he was likely in his late teens...anyway, old enough to help carry the wood up the Moriah hill.

What boy of that age, seeing his father standing there with a knife, would willingly allow his father to tie him up on top of that altar?

Just picture Isaac lying there, on this makeshift altar somewhere on a Moriah hill, bound to the wood, and with his father, Abraham, standing there holding a knife. It must have been terribly frightening.

The only suggestion that this was the case with Isaac is when he says to his father, "The fire and wood are here but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?" Otherwise nothing from Isaac other than passive acquiescence to his fate.

And what about Abraham himself? Even if he believed this sacrifice of his son was what was required in order for him to prove his faith, would he not have one horrific conflict of conscience as he stands there, knife in hand?

If we read it in the newspapers today we'd be outraged. So why was it preserved for us in scripture? What is it meant to tell us? This has puzzled the best minds for centuries, and several possible meanings have been offered.

Possible Meaning Number One:

There was a time, in many ancient cultures, when the first child born to a family was sacrificed in order to try and appease the gods. It could therefore be that this Abraham—Isaac story is meant to show a turning point in that history...at least among the Hebrew people...and a turning to other ritualistic sacrifices. Maybe this is the meaning behind the story.

While I don't think there are any religions or cultures that still practice ritualistic human sacrifice today, there were cultures that still had that practice into the 19th century.

In a similar vein though, every once in a while, a story appears in the news about parents who, for reasons of their faith, risk their child's life by refusing some medical procedure. And every day, the best and brightest of earth's sons and daughters are sacrificed in the cause of war—some of those wars based on religious beliefs.

Possible Meaning Number Two:

The episode ends with an angel stopping Abraham at the last critical second by pointing to a ram caught in a thicket...which Abraham took as a sign that God had provided a sacrifice to be taken in place of Isaac. And thus this story becomes a morality tale emphasizing that God will provide. All we need do is hang in there in faith and God will do the rest, and everything will turn out okay.

Trouble is everything does not always turn out okay. Every day somebody kneels in prayer that their sick child will recover. Sometimes they do. Sometimes they don't.

Are we to believe that God provided in those cases where the child did survive, but, in those *don't* cases, God didn't provide because the faith of the parents was not sufficiently strong?

Maybe you can look at it that way, and you are certainly free to do so, but...I'm sorry...I can't. That kind of blind faith doesn't work for me. And I have sufficient life-scars that if I had to look at faith that way I would have lost it long ago.

I also do not believe that things happen as they do because they are the will of God. Life here, death there. Disasters here, miracle survivals there. That makes God far too arbitrary.

And that brings us to what I believe this story is meant to teach us.

The lesson is that living in faith is a difficult thing. Sometimes extraordinarily difficult!

Nothing in the stories suggest any feelings that either Abraham or Isaac had in the aftermath of this event on the Moriah hill. My sense is that neither could come back from this experience without being profoundly changed. Nonetheless, each had to go on with life.

Further stories in Genesis tell us that Abraham's wife, Sarah, died at the age of 122, but then, in due course, Abraham took a second wife—by the name of Keturah—and she bore him 6 more sons.

Seems that Abraham took God's commandment to "be fruitful and multiply" pretty seriously.

If he had any feelings at all, I would be amazed if Abraham didn't re-live, from time to time, that day when he almost sacrificed Isaac. Unfortunately, we aren't told anything about their relationship from that day on, except that when Abraham finally died, at the ripe old age of 175, he gave all that he had to Isaac.

As for Isaac...Isaac waited until he was 40 to marry Rebekah. He is said to have outlived his father, living to the age of 180 and becoming the oldest of the Hebrew patriarchs.

Again, we aren't told of any effects that he carried from that experience with his father when he was only a teenager but, again, I would be amazed if he didn't recall and re-live that event from time to time.

It would have been easy for both of those men to give up on their faith completely. Abraham could have become angry and bitter at God for even suggesting that he sacrifice his son. Isaac could have become angry and bitter at both God and his father and said, "If that's what faith means, I want no part of it."

But the succeeding stories suggest quite the opposite. Both Abraham and Isaac continued to live lives of strong faith right to the end. That one day had been a life-or-death experience, but for either to stay forever damaged by it would have been to choose death—keeping on living, yes, but the kind of life that just walks around—and that is the same as death.

To choose life meant to go on living in faith—living as fully as is humanly possible.

You see, faith is a choice. Sometimes it's a very tough choice. But, no matter who we are, and no matter what has happened to us—no matter what difficult things life has brought us—we have to go on living. As I have said, on more than one occasion before, we may be able to understand life backwards but there is only one way to live it and that is forward.

Legend has it that when God created the first man—Adam—God gave him a secret. God said, "Creation began with you. I can't show you how to begin, but what I will show you is how to begin again."

As with Adam, the privilege to begin again rests with you and me. Life becomes a persistent matter of choosing whether to live on the side of death or the side of life. Faith chooses the side of life. Faith chooses, no matter what, to begin again.

May that be your choice...and mine!

Amen.

Hymn — Though I May Speak VU 372

1. Though I may speak with bravest fire,
And have the gift to all inspire,
And have not love, my words are vain,
As sounding brass, and hopeless gain.

2. Though I may give all I possess,
And striving so my love profess,
But not be given by love within,
The profit soon turns strangely thin.

3. Come, Spirit, come, our hearts control,
Our spirits long to be made whole.
Let inward love guide every deed;
By this we worship, and are freed.

Sharing our Joys and Concerns

- **Birthdays**
 - Don Kruger celebrates on Feb. 11
- **Condolences**
 - We extend our deepest condolences to the family of Marion Joan Foster who passed away on January 29th
 - We extend our deepest condolences to the family of Elmer Shortt who passed away on February 1st. Visitation will be held at today, February 8 from 1:00-2:45pm. Followed by a funeral service at 3:00pm. A reception will follow

Poem — February Light (by Tom Watson)

In early January, when we
 stood at the threshold of a
new year, the days arrived
 soft-footed, uncertain—like
toddlers learning to walk.

Then, as the days turned bold
 and began to march across
snow-furrowed fields, we
 huddled for warmth and quietly
watched the landscape change.

Now, as February brings more
 light to gather on our shoulders,
memories of former springs stir
 and something in us leans forward,
ready to rise with renewed intention.

Prayers of the people and the Prayer of Jesus

Offering Hymn: Praise God from whom all Blessings Flow VU # 541

Praise God, from whom all blessings flow;
Praise God, all creatures high and low;
Give thanks to God in love made known,
Creator, Word and Spirit One.

Offering Prayer

Minute for Mission: <https://youtu.be/VZsKJfS2k4Q>

Hymn — How Firm a Foundation VU 660

1. How firm a foundation, you servants of God,
Is laid for your faith in God's excellent word!
What more can be said than to you has been said,
To you who for refuge to Jesus have fled?
2. Fear not, I am with you, O be not dismayed,
For I am your God, and will still give you aid;
I'll strengthen you, help you, and cause you to stand,
Upheld by my righteous, omnipotent hand.
3. When through the deep waters I call you to go,
The rivers of sorrow shall not overflow;
For I will be near you, your troubles to bless,
And sanctify to you your deepest distress.
4. When through fiery trials your pathway shall lie,
My grace, all sufficient, shall be your supply;
The flame shall not hurt you; I only design
Your dross to consume, and your gold to refine.
5. The soul that on Jesus has leaned for repose,
I will not, I will not desert to its foes;
That soul, though all hell should endeavor to shake,
I'll never, no, never, no, never forsake!

Benediction

As we leave this sacred place for another week...

May we return to our homes enlivened and renewed.

May we be constantly thankful for the life that sustains us...

And open to the grace that surrounds and surprises us.

May we encounter all of life with openness and thanksgiving...

And may gentleness, kindness, compassion and caring be our constant companions!

Go in peace.

Amen.

Departing Hymn — Go Now in Peace

Go now in peace. Never be afraid.
God will go with you each hour ev'ry day.
Go now in faith, steadfast, strong and true.

Know God will guide you in all you do.
Go now in love, and show you believe.
Reach out to others so all the world can see.
God will be there, within, around, above.
Go now in peace, in faith, and in love.
Amen, Amen, Amen.

Postlude — Be Thou My Vision *arr. Susan W. Henry (Colleen and Mercedes Weber)*

Welcomers: Alison Rainford, Larry Broome

Counters: Karen Smillie, Phil Brown

Worship Schedule

February 15 th	Transfiguration Sunday	Rev. Linda Butler
February 22 nd	1 st in Lent (Communion)	Rev. Tom Watson
March 1 st	2 nd in Lent	Rev. Jeff Hawkins
March 8 th	3 rd in Lent (Annual Congregational Meeting)	Rev. Tom Watson

Council Meeting Feb 4, Mar 4. Please reach out to a Council member if there is a concern or question to be shared with Council.