

We're thinking about Abraham tonight and then in two weeks time we'll be thinking about Joseph. In March and April, we'll be focussing on a book from the New Testament.

Abraham or Abram as he was known first, had a major problem in his early life. He was happily married but he and his wife had no children. Abram and Sarai longed to have children. It wasn't just that they wanted children to be a happy family or to carry on their genes. They needed children so that they could be looked after in their old age and so that when they finally died, their worldly goods (of which they had many) wouldn't go to a distant family member or a stranger.

God eventually answered their prayers. It took 25 years after God had promised this to the couple for their son Isaac to be born. I wonder what life was like between the promise being given and the promise being fulfilled? For many days they would have trusted God. Doubts would probably have crept in now and again though. I get doubts about life sometimes – we all do!

Eventually Sarah became pregnant and their wait was over. They must have been walking on cloud nine for quite a while. Eventually their baby was born. How did they both treat Isaac after his birth? Did he play with the other children or was he kept at home and cared for in a very regimental and tight manner? Isaac was a definite answer to pray and both Abraham and Sarah would have loved him very much.

He had a major problem in his later life too. God said something to him that must have really shocked him. We might have asked God for clarification or time for us to consider the ramifications. Abraham probably didn't ask his wife for her advice as perhaps she wouldn't have been so free in saying, "Go for it Abraham! Go and sacrifice our only son – the one we waited for for 25 years." S

Abraham says a certain phrase twice in the second passage we heard read tonight. "Here I am!" He was saying to God, "I am Your child and I don't understand everything that is going on, but I trust You. You are my Father and You have always been good to me."

For the two days I bet Abraham was looking for a lamb or animal to sacrifice. Literally it was a barren place they were travelling through – both physically and spiritually/emotionally. Abraham kept going and the young Isaac would have been asking the normal child-like questions and statements: “Are we nearly there yet? Where’s the sacrifice dad? I’m hot! Where did you say the sacrifice was dad?”

Humanly speaking all hope was lost. Abraham and his lovely son got to the mountain and Abraham was just about to kill his son. God had said do it and there was no substitute.

Just then there was a divine intervention – you might call it a coincidence. God stepped in and turned the impossible situation around. A ram was nearby and Abraham used that to sacrifice to God. Something unexpected happened and it was all because God intervened.

I’m *really* interested in current affairs. I love to watch a debate about politics, economics, law making, social change, transport infrastructure and other such things. Robin Day, John Humphrys, David Dimbleby, Robin Lustig, Eddie Mair – there are a few that I really like.

Now probably three of you have just decided to switch off because you think I’m going to be less interesting than normal and one person has listened up a little more as you are fascinated by current affairs too. The rest of you might give me another minute before you start thinking about something else.

The thing about this kind of subject is that a member of the audience might ask a simple question, but everyone knows there are many views on the problem that has been brought up and there are no simple answers. Homelessness, HS2, the NHS, Brexit, selling arms to other countries – some of us will have strong views on these topics. Many might think that the current government (or a previous one) is doing badly or extremely well with how they deal with some of these issues. There are a wide range of difficult problems that government

ministers, civil servants and diplomats try to solve and very often they don't manage to, even after many years. The problem is too big, too complex, too scary or not affordable to solve. Governments try to put the metaphorical sticking plaster on. The problem doesn't go away though!

Every country faces its own problems – just like every town does. Sometimes it seems impossible to solve a particular problem. Sometimes there *is* a solution, but the financial cost makes it prohibitive to sort out. There is a much, much, much greater problem than traffic delays in the Nuneaton and the cost of the green bin in this Borough.

Every time we take communion, we are in effect thinking about the problem and giving thanks to God for solving it. The problem is that of sin. Sin is a major problem. It blights the life of all the 7.6 billion people that live on the earth. People try to sort the problem out by doing good things, but that only makes a person feel good, it doesn't sort out the root problem.

Only God could sort the problem out. Jesus, the sin-less One, came to earth to die for humanity so that our relationship with God could be restored. Mankind could do nothing to sort the problem out. It was too big and too difficult. It was impossible to do anything about it that wasn't just like putting a sticking plaster on a broken leg.

All hope was lost, but God stepped in and turned the impossible situation around. Only God sort out the problem of sin both utterly and permanently. Can we grasp His love for us: Ephesians 3:14-21

⁶When we were unable to help ourselves, at the right time, Christ died for us, although we were living against God. ⁷Very few people will die to save the life of someone else. Although perhaps for a good person someone might possibly die. ⁸But God shows his great love for us in this way: Christ died for us while we were still sinners. Romans 5:6-8 [*New Century Version*]

Hymn: To God be the glory!