

A God like no other

What will it take for us to turn away from the lesser gods who are consuming our children without hindrance?

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When will we stop sacrificing our children to appease unresponsive gods? Our children die on the altars of hatred, fear, ignorance, and greed on a daily basis. And the funny thing is the spilling of their blood changes nothing. We continue to blame addicts for their supposed weakness and tell ourselves that they are not worth saving. We justify police shooting unarmed black men by telling ourselves that “the system works.” We sit back and let war continue because it is “over there.” We let children go to schools with inadequate resources and wonder why they don’t do well. We restrict access to mental health care, safe housing, and health care and shake our heads when the numbers of homeless individuals continues to rise. How many of our children need to be consumed by these greedy, societal gods before we recognize that there is another way?

We have spent so much time criticizing Abraham’s parenting skills and his “blind faith” that we have failed to learn the lesson of this story. God did not require the sacrifice of Isaac. Other gods of the time demanded child sacrifice to be appeased, but the God of Abraham did not. It’s possible that Abraham believed God needed the sacrifice of Isaac because all the other gods of the time required child sacrifice. Abraham knew it was in the realm of what a god could ask. Yet, God, the one who led Abraham to a new land and promised a glorious future, would never require someone to do such a thing. God requires only love and grateful service. Why is it that we think sacrificing our children will change anything? Thousands of years have gone by since God told Abraham that the blood of children was not required. This was not the way of the God of Abraham. And it never would be.

I know some of you are thinking that God sacrificed God's own child to cleanse the world which would negate the idea that God does not ask for the sacrifice of children. We must then ask ourselves how it is that Jesus ended up being crucified. God didn't do it. Human beings did. The Temple authorities and the Roman authorities colluded to put an end to a treasonous revolutionary before the peasants actually rose up in revolt. Jesus, like so many children before and since, was sacrificed on the altar of hatred, fear, ignorance, and greed. Unlike with Isaac, God didn't intervene to provide another sacrifice. Instead, God transformed death to life to show, once again, that violence and death are not stronger than love.

We worship a God like no other. We worship a God who wants only goodness for us. Saving Isaac was a display of God's difference from other gods. This is not a God who wants torment and torture for the people of God. This is a God who yearns for us to discover our value, our innate holiness, and for us to live in the abundance of grace God provides. Yet, somehow, sparing Isaac was not enough. Resurrecting Jesus was not enough. What will it take for us to turn away from these lesser gods who are destroying us, consuming our children without hindrance?

In Romans, Paul so eloquently reminds us that we are not to be slaves of sin and death. We belong to Christ whose ways lead to eternal life. When Christ's ways become our ways, the bloodthirsty gods of our day diminish in power and appeal. Yes, they will always be around to tempt us with quick fixes, fragile safety, and fleeting power. However, Christ's ways bring transformation that truly heals, sanctuary that lovingly protects, and strength that builds rather than destroys.

It's easier than we think. Jesus tells us, in Matthew's gospel, that it's about unwavering, extravagant hospitality. We are to go out of our way to welcome all those we meet. We are to go out of our way to save our children from the dangers of this world. That cold cup of water might be inconvenient to provide in the desert heat, but it's possible and it is life-saving. Hatred, fear, ignorance, and greed will tell us that it's okay to continue as we are, but they are known liars. We worship a God like no other, a God of life and love. Is it not time to stop sacrificing our children and start welcoming all, one cup of cold water at a time?

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