

***It's All About Offering***  
*Genesis 14: 14-23*

**First Presbyterian Church  
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Our Scripture this morning tells a fascinating episode from the saga of Abraham. His nephew Lot had been captured during a war between kings in that region of the world. Seems that a king named Chedorlaomer of Elam was the big boy on the block. Four lesser kings rebelled against him. But Chedorlaomer gathered four other kings who were loyal to him and went to war. Now if you want a challenge, go to Genesis 14 and just try to pronounce the names of these nine kings and their regions. By the way, young parents, please don't search Genesis 14 for baby names! In the process of putting down the rebellion, Chedorlaomer plundered the region where Lot, Abraham's brother was living. He took Lot captive, perhaps hoping for a large ransom.

Abraham was having none of this. We discover that Abraham had 318 trained fighting men. He mustered his guys and went to make war. Now I wouldn't think that 318 men would be enough to go against the combined forces of five hostile kings. But the LORD was with Abraham, and his men triumphed decisively. Abraham rescued Lot and all the other people who had been captured. He got back all their possessions too. Abraham paid no ransom. He got justice. And Chedorlaomer learned his lesson: we never hear about him again. You can go ahead and forget his name.

Now as Abraham returned from his victory, a new character suddenly appeared. A king who had not been part of this battle went out to meet Abraham. His name was Melchizedek. His name is one you *do* want to remember, because, as we will see, he is very important in salvation history. Melchizedek's name means, "King of Righteousness." His actual territory included the city of Salem, which means peace. So Melchizedek was both the King of Righteousness and the King of Peace. That should be a clue to us that he matters. We hear echoes of Jesus all over the place.

So Melchizedek went out to meet Abraham, and he brought with him bread and wine. He wanted to dine with Abraham. He wanted to host him there in the desert. Then we read something else about Melchizedek. He was priest of God Most High. Mel was a king. And Mel was a priest. Mel the King/Priest brought out bread and wine to fellowship with Abraham. Something mysterious and

wondrous was going on. Bells ring in our minds and hearts. It sounds like Jesus feeding the 5000 in the desert. It sounds like communion.

Now the next thing we read is that Melchizedek pronounced a blessing on Abraham. He said,

Blessed be Abram by God Most High,  
Possessor of heaven and earth;  
And blessed be God Most High,  
Who delivered your enemies into your hand.

I'll say he's a priest! A priest brings the things of God to man. And he brings the things of man to God. Melchizedek placed the name of God all over Abraham. "May the God who has blessed you keep blessing you!" He reminded Abraham that God Most High won that victory for him. And he asked for God's powerful presence to remain upon Abraham. Then Melchizedek blessed God. Our God is no minor deity that would be with that gaggle of minor kings that Abraham has just defeated. No, he is God Most High, the Creator, Possessor and Redeemer of all the earth. This was a powerful blessing linking the Almighty God with his faithful servant Abraham.

I had a very interesting sensation studying this passage with the elders last week. We read the whole chapter, including all those tongue-twister names of forgotten kings and all those strange names of obscure places. There was a real sense of being immersed in the grind of history. The machinery of politics and warfare rolled through the passages. It was oppressive to the spirit, and you wondered at the futility of this game of thrones. But when Melchizedek arrived on the scene and pronounced his blessing, a lightness filled the room. His words were like cool water in the desert. They were like, well, like communion in bread and wine. Like a feast in the wilderness. The praise of the one true God elevated our spirits above the monotony of the endless strivings of man against man. Just so, worship elevates us into a deeper, truer reality than all our gettings and spendings.

The next thing that happened brought another surprise. Abraham gave to Melchizedek a tenth of all his possessions! Melchizedek appeared out of nowhere. He set a table and offered a blessing. And Abraham offered him ten percent of all he owned. That's the amount you give to acknowledge one who is the king over you. That's the kind of gift you give to the one you acknowledge as your God. As the listeners to this story, we're stunned. Because we thought the only man who knew the LORD I Am was Abraham, and maybe his family. But God surprises us.

He's got people. Here comes Melchizedek the King of Righteousness and Peace who as a priest offered God's fellowship and blessing. He accepts Abraham's gift as the appropriate response. Something deeply spiritual has just happened, and it's all about offering.

*Offering is participation.* It means we have skin in the game. We're involved. We have a stake in what will happen. I remember when our children were very little, my parents came to visit us in the old house we were trying to renovate. It was not, perhaps, the kind of environment my mother had envisioned for her grandchildren. I remember her sitting on the couch and saying, "I want to spend. I want to shop. I want to buy." Now my mother was one of the all-time world's greatest shoppers. She loved it and she was good at it. But she was expressing more than just her pleasure in exercising her rights and duties as a consumer. Mom wanted to participate in the lives of our children. She wanted to bless and be connected to meeting needs and spreading happiness. She wanted to make an offering that got her immersed in our lives. Of course, as part of my sonly duty, I let her shop for us! Offering, after all, is participation.

Next week we dedicate our pledges to God for his work through the life and ministry of our church. It's one crucial way we participate. We get in on what God is up to in our midst and through us to the world. We step out on faith to make an intentional pledge that relies on God's continuing bounty. We agree that it's important for church leadership to know what to expect so we plan responsibly. We want to know that we are, each and all of us who give, invested in this building. We are, each and all, on the field with our missionaries. We're in the children's classes downstairs and the Bible studies around town. We're in Gardere and Buchanan and a Habitat Home. We're in all of these because we're participating by offering.

You can see this going on in Children's Ministry. Our Children's Ministry Director, Audra Cato created a wonderful pledge card for children. The card says, "I Want to Give Too. By giving to First Presbyterian Church, I'm saying "thank you" to God." On the back of the card, the child is invited to draw a picture or write about what he plans to give this year. I love this because children love to give. Because they love to participate. They want to be in on all that is going on. That's what makes doing the Blessing Bags project so fun. We're all finding a way to get involved in mission, even if it's just stuffing snacks into a plastic bag. Offering is participation which is communion, with God and one another.

I'd like to tell you about a powerful way this has worked in our church. Several years ago we conducted a \$5 million campaign to renovate our church facilities. Can you even remember what it used to be like? Can you imagine where we'd be if we had no children's and youth rooms under this sanctuary? Can you imagine not having the terrace garden for fellowship? Or still having Styrofoam ceiling tiles in the sanctuary? It was vital work and took a significant commitment. When we undertook the campaign, our elders determined that there needed to be a piece of this work that looked beyond ourselves. From the start, we said that we would take 10% of all we received and put it into play for kingdom work beyond these walls. For city ministry, for global mission, and for church planting.

That was not an easy commitment to maintain. It was very tempting when we had not reached our goal but we had spent the money to say, "Well, why don't we just use the mission component to pay the debt? Why would we ask people to give more when we could just decide not to give away the money for mission?" Don't think I wasn't tempted to cave in to those thoughts. What kind of fool gives away ten per cent of the money he's raised in a bad economy? Your leadership held firm to the vision, and so I get to tell you about wonderful blessings.

During the Arab spring, our partner church in Cairo broadcast the gospel to a nation in turmoil. Hundreds of thousands awakened to their hunger for the message of love and forgiveness that only Jesus can give. There was an unprecedented surge in viewing. They broadcast using television equipment that First Presbyterian Church purchased—because we had a mission component.

Nearly two years ago, we sent Alec Flynt, our associate pastor, to Spring Hill near Mobile, Alabama. He accepted a call to be the first pastor of Covenant Presbyterian Church. They met in rented space and grew steadily. Alec and I stay in regular conversation; I worked with their elders on a retreat in the spring. This past summer, the church voted to purchase and renovate a church that was for sale in the neighborhood where most of their members live. In September, your elders voted to give \$100,000 to Covenant Church for this project. Where would we ever get the funding for such a gift? From the mission component of our capital campaign! It was a gift that came with an understanding. In due time, as the church grows, they will pay back \$50,000. But not directly to us. They will put \$50,000 into a fund for planting more churches. We pledged to match that \$50,000 so that the gift to Covenant will pay forward into creating new churches.

Now here's the kicker. I talked to Alec last week. Last Sunday Covenant had their pledge Sunday for the building project. Their people pledged \$395,000 so

far. We added our \$100,000. That's \$495,000. Now guess what the purchase price on the property turned out to be? Of course. \$495,000. Sure, they still have to finance the renovations, but the property and building itself are taken care of. A vibrant Presbyterian Church is rising in Spring Hill. And we are there.

Offering to God always leads to more offering. Participation grows. The world and its politics and conflicts grind on. But then God arrives and offers bread and wine in the desert. Abraham replies with the offer of a tenth of all he had. Blessing flows from God and to God. The world gets changed.

We don't hear about Melchizedek again for at least 1500 years. Then, mysteriously, he pops up in Psalm 110, one of the great prayers of King David. Psalm 110 is actually the most quoted Old Testament passage in the New Testament. Here's why. David writes,

The LORD said to my Lord, "Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool.

Wait a minute. King David, the ruler of all Israel, is saying that the LORD God, the LORD I Am was speaking to David's "lord." Who besides God himself could be considered the "lord" of King David? The psalm continues:

The LORD has sworn and will not change his mind, "You are a priest forever, after the order of Melchizedek.

The LORD God has declared that there is a king and a priest who is greater than David, who continues forever, who is like the mysterious Melchizedek. Don't you know David wondered what he had written? The rabbis and scribes pondered the meaning of this strange reference for a thousand more years. Until the mystery was solved.

The writer of the book of Hebrews declares boldly that Jesus is our high priest. He is the one like Melchizedek. Jesus is the one who brings God down to man. Jesus is the one who offers the faithfulness and obedience of man to God. He is the go-between. He spreads a table before in the midst of the conflicts, boredom, obligations, wars and struggles of this world. He offers the love of God in the gift of himself. We meet with God the Father through him. He is the blessing of God in the flesh given to us. Jesus blesses his Father as the man who has gone into heaven on our behalf.

Hebrews tells us that Jesus has his priesthood through the power of an endless, indestructible life (7:16). He is not like the old order of priests who have to offer the blood of lambs and bulls to cover their own sins as well as those of the people. Jesus offered once for all his blood on the cross, the sinless one who can alone make a real atonement. We draw near to God through him. Not in ourselves, but through our go-between, our high priest. Jesus is the connector. We meet our heavenly Father in Christ. For he is God and man in one person. Jesus himself is the reconciliation of God and man, the place where we meet and are made one.

And it's all about offering. Think of this in summary. Jesus offered himself to us:

- 1) By taking up our humanity and becoming a man.
- 2) By his ministry of love and healing in the world.
- 3) By going to the cross to take our place in bearing sin.

Jesus offered himself to his Father:

- 1) By agreeing to leave heaven and come to earth.
- 2) In his constant obedience to his Father's will while in the world.
- 3) In his supreme act of offering on the cross.

He continues to offer himself to his Father in our name. For even now he loves and worships his Father. He continues to offer *us* to his Father as well, for even now Jesus intercedes for us. He praises his Father and prays for his people.

Jesus continues to offer himself to us, pouring out his Spirit on us, joining us to himself and making us more and more like him. He offers himself now in communion as the gospel is preached and the bread and wine are shared.

How do we get more in on that? How do we participate? We offer. Just like Jesus. We offer ourselves, as Paul says, as living sacrifices to our God. We offer a sacrifice of praise in weekly worship. We make an offering of the tithe, the ten per cent of our resources. We offer our obedience and availability by the way we love, bless and serve.

It's all about offering. A table has been set in the desert. The King of Righteousness and Peace spreads bread and wine before us. Eat. Drink. Become one with me. Offer me your faith. Your trust. Offer me your life, your service and your love. Join me in offering blessing to the Father, God Most High, Creator and Possessor of all the earth, and then you will participate in the greatest feast of joy.