

**Holy Trinity Lutheran Church
Des Moines, Wash.
October 3, 2010**

“The Ten Commandments” series

Genesis 22:1-9

It's Easy to Question Authority!

1. Why do we desire control?
2. Why does God give us his representatives?
3. What makes it so that we so easily rebel?
4. How do you rebel against God's representatives?

**Hymns: 440 – 501 –
Distribution: 500 – 310
Closing: Glorify Thy Name**

All Scripture quotations from the NIV.

What does this thing mean to you (Showing Remote Control)? To me, this means power. It means control. It means that if I don't like something, I have the way to change it. In my house growing up, this was something that was often fought over. The desire for control is not just limited to the remote, is it?

Everyone wants to be in control, don't they? Control means security. It means you have a grip on what is currently happening. It means you have a say in what will happen. Control means that if you don't like something, you have the ability to change it. If we all had it our way, we would be in control of everything in our lives.

But the truth of the matter is that we spend our lives under the watch and control of others. Of course, this is for our good. As babies, we need continuous care and safekeeping. As children, we need training as we grow and develop. Teenagers need guidance as they start to face “real” life. Adults need jobs and jobs need organization and supervision. Citizens need safety and order. As believers, we need that same care, training, guidance and safety in a spiritual way. And God supplies for our needs in the form of what we call his representatives - parents, teachers, bosses, government leaders, church leaders - to watch over

all those different areas of our life. God's representatives are a tremendous blessing to us. Paul spoke of those blessings in the two lessons we heard a few moments ago. They make it so that “things might go well for us and we might enjoy life on this earth.” (Eph 6:3) In Romans, we are told representatives are put in place “to do you good.” (Romans 13:4) In spite of that knowledge, it is often easy to doubt whether those in authority are actually a blessing for us.

See, our sinful nature hates being under control. It rebels against anyone or anything that would try to tell us how we should live. It makes us skeptical of their decisions and their directions. Just think about your attitude toward those who are in authority over you. Think first about our President and government leaders. Do you always speak well of them? Are you excited about their plans for healthcare? Are you supportive of the direction of the education system? Do you give a big thumbs up for tax increases? It is pretty easy to be skeptical about the people who lead our country.

How about another representative, your boss at work? Do you complain about the long hours that he asks you to work? Do you get angry when he feels it is necessary to cut some of your coworkers, with no apparent regard for all their years of service? Do you balk when the announcement comes that the workload is going to increase, but the pay will not? Do you have doubts about the direction of the company? It is easy to doubt whether your boss is managing things with any interest in the well-being of you and your fellow employees.

Teens, how about the authority figures in your lives? Do you always see your parents as a blessing? Do you complain when curfew is set a little too early? Do you get mad when you get punished for something you don't think is that big of a deal? Do you get frustrated when you aren't allowed to do something that everyone else's parents have said yes to? What about your teachers? Do you respect the advice they give? Do you cut them down when their grading seems a little harsh or their assignments take too much time? Do you mock them when you are outside the classroom? Sometimes, it isn't too difficult to come to the conclusion that everyone who is older than you is against you.

Even at church, this rebel spirit can come out in each of us. Do you question how the money is spent? Do you doubt the direction that the council decides? Do you get upset when plans change? Are you bitter when your voice isn't always able to be heard? Do

you cringe when we tell you that you can't commune with him or you shouldn't pray with her? Even in church, there are times when it's not hard to want to defy authority.

Our sinful nature is so good at persuading us in any situation that we have every right to question authority. It tells us so convincingly that we should have more control. It is very successful in persuading us to rebel.

In our Bible story this morning, we see a person who seemingly would have had every right to go against the representative that God had given him in his life. We read from Genesis 22:1-9: **“Some time later God tested Abraham. He said to him, ‘Abraham!’ ‘Here I am,’ he replied. 2 Then God said, ‘Take your son, your only son, Isaac, whom you love, and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains I will tell you about.’ 3 Early the next morning Abraham got up and saddled his donkey. He took with him two of his servants and his son Isaac. When he had cut enough wood for the burnt offering, he set out for the place God had told him about. 4 On the third day Abraham looked up and saw the place in the distance. 5 He said to his servants, ‘Stay here with the donkey while I and the boy go over there. We will worship and then we will come back to you.’ 6 Abraham took the wood for the burnt offering and placed it on his son Isaac, and he himself carried the fire and the knife. As the two of them went on together, 7 Isaac spoke up and said to his father Abraham, ‘Father?’ ‘Yes, my son?’ Abraham replied. ‘The fire and wood are here,’ Isaac said, ‘but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?’ 8 Abraham answered, ‘God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son.’ And the two of them went on together. 9 When they reached the place God had told him about, Abraham built an altar there and arranged the wood on it. He bound his son Isaac and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood.”**

Pretty amazing faith and confidence in that story, isn't there? I mean, if ever there were a time when the words, "Honor your father" shouldn't apply, this would have to be it, wouldn't it? Would any of us have thought poorly of Isaac if he had questioned why there was no lamb a little more emphatically? Would we shake our head in disapproval if he had pushed his elderly father away as he tried to bind him with ropes and sacrifice him? Certainly not! And let's not make the mistake of assuming that he couldn't have done that. At this time in his life, Isaac was

physically superior to his father Abraham. Some people will use the broad meaning of the Hebrew word here to say that Isaac was a very young boy who had no choice in what his father was doing to him. But it is clear from our text that this was not the case. Isaac was strong enough to carry all the wood for the burnt offering, a load that had been placed upon a donkey's back until this point. Isaac also knew enough about worship and sacrifice to know they were missing the most important part. He was old enough to have worshipped with his dad many times. There is no doubt that Isaac was a strong young man. Keep in mind also that Abraham was 100 years old when Isaac was born. He was old! Physically, Isaac could have easily stood up to this man who was trying to kill him.

More than that, Isaac would have had reasons to doubt what was happening and go against his father from a spiritual standpoint. If Abraham had worshipped before with his son, which we pointed out was clearly the case, he had no doubt told him about the true God and all of the promises that God had made to Abraham. You can picture him speaking as they went on these worship journeys before, "Isaac, my son, our God has promised that my descendants will be as numerous as the sands of the sea." "Isaac, my son, our God has promised that He will send a Savior for all the world and he will come from my family." "My son, our God has assured me that he will carry out these promises through you, Isaac." Isaac had spent his life being told about the promises of a Savior and how important he was in carrying out the plan for the world's salvation. Think of how easily, Satan could have used that against Isaac. He must have been screaming at Isaac, "Come on, Isaac! This is ridiculous! You know this can't happen! Your dad has gone off his rocker! Stand up to him! No one will blame you!"

But Isaac honored his father. He trusted that what he was doing was in his best interest, despite all the evidence to the contrary. How could Isaac show so much trust? How did he continue to obey the 4th commandment when it appeared that he should certainly do otherwise?

Isaac's obedience to his father came as a result of his faith in God. Reason would have told Isaac that if God was going to keep his promise that everything would happen through him, he would have to stand up to his father in this situation. But faith told Isaac that God was working through his father Abraham just like he had always done. If this sacrifice was the way that God was going to keep his promise, then he

would let it happen. He was confident that there was no way God would go against what he had promised. As Isaac held God to his great promise of salvation, he also trusted his father, whom God had put into his life. He saw his father as God's representative, a figure of authority that he was to listen to obediently. Even if he didn't always understand why his father was doing what he was doing, his faith in God gave him assurance. He could trust that God would work through his representative for Isaac's good. Trust in an earthly father flowed from faith in the heavenly Father.

And, sure enough, this faithful, willing submission worked out for Isaac's good. He honored his father and God kept his promise. God called off the sacrifice at the very last moment. He provided a ram to be sacrificed in Isaac's place, proving Abraham correct when he said, "The Lord will provide." He reassured Abraham and Isaac of the promise that they would have many descendants, be a powerful nation and be the family from which the Savior of all would come. As much as we couldn't see it as Isaac was bound and laid on that altar, God was working for Isaac's good through his father.

And if God was working through this, a situation where "honoring your father" seemed like a terrible idea, surely he is working in all those times when we question those who are in control in our lives. So, how can we better trust that this is always the case? How can we personally strive to better keep the 4th commandment?

Let's always keep in mind that God has kept his promise that he gave to Abraham long ago. He sent the Savior, who was Jesus Christ. And just like he promised, Jesus Christ is a blessing to people of all nations; he is the Savior of the world.

With that glorious promise kept, we can be confident that God will keep all his other promises. One of those promises is that he will work everything for our good. In order to accomplish that, he has placed people in our lives - governmental leaders, bosses, teachers, parents, church leaders - who watch over us. They govern and make decisions, but God is in control, working for us. He has promised us that. With that confidence, we can faithfully honor and trust those who have been given control. We can be supremely thankful that it isn't all in our hands. Even when we don't fully understand why the President signed this, or our boss did that, or our parents made this decision, our faith in God can give us assurance. Let us use Isaac's wonderful example in our lives as we seek to better honor the representatives that God

has given us. It will certainly work for our good to know and trust the promises that God has given and to rely on the leaders that he provides. Amen.