

Mixed feelings: Rosh Hashanah 5767

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Shabbat shalom and l'shana tova to each of you this lovely spring night. And it's a dual natured evening. We have a serious holiday on top of a joyful holiday, both listed in Leviticus 23. The first is the weekly Sabbath that began at sunset and the other is the Feast of Trumpets. The Sabbath is a joyful reminder of the Creation of the World and our Jewish people's redemption from Egypt. The Feast of Trumpets ushers in a serious, somber reality for Jewish people, the 10 Days of Awe, in which we reflect, we consider, we repent, we look for peace.

So here we have two feelings; we have two experiences...which is right? Of course, in the typical Jewish way of consideration, both are right. And generally in the Jewish way of thinking we do the long lasting before we do the incidental. So, we should be celebrating because the Sabbath is upon us. It's weekly, I know, but it's ongoing and thus pre-eminent.

Yet in the aforementioned passage in Leviticus describes the festival days of the Lord, the appointed moedim when Israel was to remember God and to rejoice and observe His memory. The holidays were about God, and not about ourselves. They were to remind us of the Almighty and to help us keep up our relationship with Him.

This conflict of two meanings can be seen in Bindy Irwin's address on Wednesday morning. That speech read without a quiver, and with aplomb uncharacteristic of her eight years, highlighted what we all felt about Steve Irwin. Her "hero" who taught the world to love wildlife. We felt sadness, and yet we celebrated his 44 years, especially his last years with us, as the Crocodile Hunter.

The world moaned at the news of Steve Irwin's passing. He lived with energy and died with energy as a stingray lashed out in a freakish accident ending the 44 year old's tenure as Crocodile Hunter, and father of two, husband of one, and legend to many. The accident took place at the Great Barrier Reef.

Irwin was on location in the area to film television segments, including material for "The Ocean's Deadliest." Witnesses on his boat, Croc One, and on a nearby diving vessel said that when he came close to a stingray, its barb pierced his chest and lodged in his heart.

And as suddenly as he started, he ended, not with a whisper but with a bang.

Many of you also were aware of Peter Brock, famed Aussie race driver and mentor of Australia's Olympic sides in Sydney and Athens. He also was on the Board of Collingwood Magpies football club.

Brock, 61, the son of a mechanic and a nine-time winner of the Bathurst 1000 during the 1970s and 80s, died instantly in the crash. He was the star attraction of the second Targa West rally, held in bushland near the small community of Gidgegannup, 40 km east of Perth.

The accident happened about 10 km into the 13 km leg of the first stage of the rally, which started in the morning and was due to run all weekend.

Just across town tonight at Telstra Stadium one of two teams will experience the last AFL match of their season. And more nearby the same ending will be said of one

of the NRL teams at Aussie Stadium. And although they've reached the Final Four, not being the last one standing will mark a disappointment for most sides. But the fans will be glad their side made it this far, and disappointed they didn't go further. Two feelings at the same time.

Like Steve Irwin and Peter Brock and those two sides in the footy, we farewell those we love and we will not be seeing anymore. We attribute memorials to them and rename highways and trophies and even stadia in their honour. And all that is appropriate. A couple weeks ago we marked the 5th anniversary of 9.11, the tragic attacks on the World Trade Center and Pentagon in the USA.

We'll come back to farewell symbols later on, but let me comment on our text tonight,

On Rosh Hashanah, we Jews usually read Genesis 22, a strange story for a Festival of Trumpets, even stranger for a holiday most call the Jewish new year. Of course, some will understand the connection is the ram's horn we sound as a trumpet and the ram caught in the thicket to substitute for Isaac's life.

I imagine a lot of feelings were alive in Isaac as the two of them walked on together. Imagine with me the scene. Isaac is 30 or so. Abraham is 130, an old man by anyone's standard.. Isaac is capable of living his own life, helping in the fields, marrying, journeying. He's happy to serve his father as requested and takes the invitation to conduct a worship service on the mountain along with some servants and they walk on. Isaac really doesn't know the purpose of the adventure.

Inside of Abraham some other thoughts were happening. God had promised a seed and a nation from Abraham. At 130, you might wonder if you were hearing right those 40 years ago, or was it 50 or 60 years earlier? God told him in Ur or in Haran to leave his family and that God would produce a new family, in fact, a great nation from him. (Genesis 12) Abraham must be remembering that on this three day journey up the hill, called Mt Moriah.

Let's read the text. Verse 2, God says "Take now your son." Abraham thinks, 'wait a minute, I have two sons.' "Your only son". Abraham thinks, 'but I have two only sons, one from Hagar and one from Sarah.' "Whom you love" Abraham thinks, 'but I love them both', so the text ends "Isaac." No question, now. Abraham is to take Isaac. And go to the land of Moriah. Down in what we moderns call Jerusalem. And offer him there as a burnt offering. Oy! What was God thinking! Did he change his mind? Did he forget those words in Haran? Should I not trust him anymore?

But what do we see really happened? Abraham arose early in the morning and got started on the journey to his son's death. Amazing faith. Amazing trust. Whatever it was that God was asking... God knew better and Abraham knew less. And friends, let me recommend that same understanding to you. God knows better than you, in everything. In how to run your life, in how to manage your relationship with your spouse, in all things, God knows everything. Way better than we do.

On the third day they arrived and Abraham gives a charge to the two companions who were with him. "stay here.. I and the lad will go... we will worship... we will return." Now what is he really saying? Abraham knows what God has asked of him. He knows that God wants him to offer Isaac on the altar as a holocaust (that's the old English word for a burnt offering). But the Bible in the Newer Testament gives us added insight, on the basis of one Hebrew letter.

Heb. 11.17 ¶ By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac; and he who had received the promises was offering up his only begotten son;

Heb. 11.18 it was he to whom it was said, “In Isaac your descendants shall be called.”

Heb. 11.19 He considered that God is able to raise men even from the dead; from which he also received him back as a type.

Where does the author of Hebrews get that information? From the Hebrew letter ‘nun.’

וְאֲנִי וְהַנֶּזֶר נִלְכָּה עַד-כֹּה  
וְנִשְׁתַּחֲוֶה וְנִשְׁוֶבָה אֵלֵיכֶם :

We will go...we will worship...we will return. That’s it. We will return. Abraham believed that God was able to raise Isaac from the dead. That’s amazing faith!

All the while Isaac is unaware. He just doesn’t know what is next in the program. So in verse 6 we read ‘the two of them walked on together.’ On their walk in verse 7 Isaac asks his father, I see the wood and the fire, but where is the lamb for the holocaust?”

Abraham’s answer (v. 8) is deep and profound and wise and compelling. He reminds Isaac that God will provide a lamb. By this we understand that God is the provider of all things for those who believe. That has been Abraham’s experience since the day he left home and has been wandering in God’s realm the last 60 years. God will always provide for his children. Isaac didn’t need much more than the reminder... the two of them ‘walked on together.’

By verse 9, we see the erecting of the altar and the placing of the wood in the right manner, and now you can feel Isaac’s questions arising again. Only you don’t hear them in the text. You only see compliance. You only see obedience. You see the father of faith has sired a son who lives by the same faith as Abraham.

Then the attempted offering, the stopping of the scene by the angel of the Lord, the finding of the ram in the thicket and the naming of the venue Jehovah Jireh (or God will provide).

All this is of course a great story, told annually on Rosh Hashanah and through photos and paintings as we saw in the earlier artistic power point array. The Akedah as it is known in Hebrew, the ‘binding’ of Isaac requires great faith on both sides of the offering.

Friends, it’s not hard to see the imagery here, is it? In the same way that God offered up His only son, whom he loved, Y’shua, for us, who willingly took the wood on his own back and walked up the Mount Calvary in Jerusalem, and died for us on that horrible Friday afternoon 2,000 years ago.

And about that event we have mixed feelings. It was a loss; it was our gain. We rejoice; we are saddened.

Earlier we spoke about farewelling those we love and about farewell symbols themselves. Probably the most notable memorial and honoured farewell symbol in the world, the most recognizable icon globally, is the cross. A simple two-stick figure of varied proportions, but known worldwide as the execution location of the Jew Jesus.

It was about 2,000 years ago when the humble carpenter from Galilee was put on the cross by Roman soldiers and executed for sedition. It marked the end of a noble career in preaching by the almost-rabbi who preached about the coming of the Kingdom of God.

Then in a twist of history, after nearly 40 hours in the tomb, miraculously he arose from the dead. And appeared to 500 Jewish people over 40 days, who saw him, who ate with him, who received correction and forgiveness from him. It was amazing!

And it's believable.

We farewell the man who gave us the 'crikey' and adventure with snakes and crocs. We farewell Brockie, and by now one of those AFL or NRL sides.

And we thank God that Y'shua, Jesus the Messiah, for whom farewells were painful, rose from the dead. That's both feelings in one moment. More than that, he offers eternal life to all those who put their trust in Him.

Will you be one of those?