

# Connected

**Speaker:** Ben Whitnall

**Date:** 23<sup>rd</sup> October 2022

**Talk title:** The struggle of commitment – or ‘and what do your gods demand of you?’

**Bible verses:** Genesis 22:1-19

## What are the main points?

- It's OK to be troubled by the story – let that lead you to grappling, and more imaginative readings
- We spend our lives on a mountain, and serving a 'god', where the sacrifice DOESN'T get interrupted: the god of endless growth, which demands we sacrifice each other and the planet in order to try and appease its demands. This has devastating consequences that we are both complicit in (Abraham) and victim to (Isaac).
- BUT it doesn't have to be that way – we know about the mountain and the God where the story ends differently. So how can we help each other to live more on Calvary than on the mountain of 'growth'?

## Questions to prompt conversation...

- What did you find most helpful or most challenging from this talk/bible passage(s)?
- Ben outlined two over-simplified ways people often respond to this passage – either 'unquestioningly do whatever God says' or 'see? God is evil; abandon the whole God project'. **Try and imagine some *other* ways this story might be functioning – what could be happening with it, that can get beyond these two 'pat' answers?** (See prompts below, if that's helpful)
- Ben talked about how we live on a parallel mountain, where the 'god' *doesn't* stop the sacrifice. On that mountain, the 'god of growth' demands the taking of human life continually, to feed its endless 'need'. This goes from tiny everyday things, like people stabbing each other in the back for promotions at work, to huge global crises, like the invasion of Ukraine or the climate emergency. **Where do you see the relentless demands of 'the god of growth' happening? What acts of aggression have you seen people doing to try and make sure they stay ahead in the fight for a finite pool of resources?**
- Ben finished by trying to point out (very hurriedly!) that the world doesn't *have* to work this way – that, as Christians especially, we know about the existence of other mountains and another God, one who chooses love and mercy and justice and self-sacrifice, putting others before ourselves. The way of Calvary offers a fundamentally different alternative, a different mountain, to the merciless god of growth. But it's

not easy to inhabit this other way, especially when everything in our society tells us to 'look out for number 1', to put ourselves first, to win the fight for resources and keep sacrificing to the god of growth. SO: **how can we help each other, practically, every day, to live less and less on the mountain of merciless growth and more and more on the mountain of a merciful God?**

### **what if it's...**

allegory

satire

parable

joke

myth

poetry

provocation

midrash

test

song

fable

### **as seen from...**

the attendants

abraham

the knife

god

the ram

isaac

the mountain

sarah

the altar