

Column

“Ghost stories” excite. God’s stories encourage. One of the latter came to me directly as the new year opened.

On Jan. 1, I got up early and felt compelled to cook all those things Southerners are supposed to eat on first day of the New Year. I boiled the black-eyed peas which had been soaking overnight with several pieces of hog jowl. I cleaned a mess of turnip greens and put them on to cook, likewise with a piece of fat pork. I put together and baked a sweet potato pie, and put rice and water in the steamer and set it aside for later.

There was only one problem. Who would eat this food? I was the only one at home, and no one had been invited.

Later that morning, still in a state of perplexity, I went to church for a noontday

communion service (Jan. 1 is the Feast of the Circumcision of Christ in the Church Calendar). As I did, a story from the Bible came to mind. It was of young Isaac setting off with his father Abraham to go up Mt. Moriah to offer a sacrifice. Isaac's perplexity was that the two had fire and wood, but no animal to be offered. When Isaac brought this lack to his father's attention, Abraham said: "God will provide."

God did provide. As Abraham (who believed God could raise the dead) was pulling back the knife to sacrifice Isaac, God intervened. In so doing, God revealed once and for all that human sacrifices (something the pagans living around them practiced) was not what He desired. Instead, God provided a substitute: a ram caught in a thicket.

Just to cap off the story, the whole enterprise pointed forward to the time when God Himself would offer His Son to undo the sin of Adam and bring blessing and healing to the world.

What Abraham could not do, offer the perfect sacrifice, God in the fullness of time did. Jesus is the true lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world.

Returning to my story, God likewise provided. He provided not only food – as He does day by day -- but people to eat it. After the service, a couple with a child along with another couple who were visiting from Alabama said they were looking for a place to eat lunch. I immediately invited them to go home with me and eat. My labor was not in vain, and how delightful it was to let God choose the guests.

I dare say all of us have had God moments, times when heaven and earth intersect . . . occasions when God leaves us, as it were, with a Post-it note reminding us of His presence and providence.

In 2025, may we keep our eyes open for such moments. The God of Abraham and Isaac

remains active in human affairs. His faithfulness never fails. Be encouraged!

ALMIGHTY and everlasting God, who dost govern all things in heaven and earth; Mercifully hear the supplications of thy people, and grant us thy peace all the days of our life; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. (Collect for the Second Sunday after Epiphany, Book of Common Prayer)

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