This weeks’ lesson is problematic. It’s disturbing and it creates a lot of questions for the modern- day listener. What kind of God would ask someone to sacrifice their own child? This story begins with the words: “God tested Abraham”. This story is about Abraham. Yes, Isaac is a crucial part but he has very little actual dialogue. He follows his father on a three day journey. He carries the wood for his own sacrifice. But it is Abraham who is being tested. A couple weeks ago we talked about Abrahams track record in the decades before he and Sarah gave birth to Isaac. Abraham had trouble at times doing the right thing and following God. However,God keeps the covenant he created with Abraham and Sarah even though it doesn’t happen until well into their old age. Now Abraham’s obedience and perhaps more importantly his faithfulness to God is being tested. Abraham’s response is immediate: “Here I am”. There was no more hiding behind any of the facades he’d used when pressed in the past. He did as he was told. He was willing to sacrifice this child who God had promised him. Abraham didn’t know that God was testing him, but there is decisive, unquestioned answer to God’s call: Here I am. He packed up with his two men and Isaac and left on the journey. Some scholars have said that this story indicated God’s desire to end human sacrifice and just accept animal sacrifice. But I would argue that neither of these is the sacrifice God desires for us. Abraham leaves his father’s house when he is called by God to lead the Hebrew nations. He spends his life trying to follow God. At times he is more successful than others but the inertia toward God is present throughout. He answers the call: Here I am. Faithfulness and sacrifice are things that not all of us have a choice about. Women have until recently sacrificed careers and dreams to support their men. It was expected and enforced. African Americans are now protesting hundreds of years of enslavement, lynching, oppression of all kinds. They are sick of sacrificing their children to police brutality, lack of opportunities and mass incarceration. Yet, if you know the history, you know the rich faithfulness that many enslaved blacks held to God even through enslavement, Jim Crow, and to this current day. Our own faithfulness to God calls us to something greater than our own desires. It calls us to follow where God is leading. As a nation we are being called to end our systems of inequality, of oppression and to right a system that is broken and benefitting only a tiny portion of this nations’ wealthiest people.

In my book of Holy Troublemakers I am drawn today to a man who had a quiet, under-spoken faithfulness to God and to justice. Mr. Fred Rogers. I say he was quiet but when he needed to speak out to Congress to fight for tv that was educational and diverse for children he had the courage to do so. This is a man unlike many people in this culture. He was gentle, soft spoken, cared for children deeply, and gave all people a voice. He did this at a time when it was dangerous to do so.

He saw a need for a television show that portrayed relationships to children, not just special effects. He did this by using puppets, by singing, by doing simple acts like removing and changing his cardigan and his shoes, normal everyday things children related to. He gave voice to people on the show that in 1968 were different from what was considered the mainstream society. He had children with disabilities, a black policeman who he talked to while they cooled their feet in a kids pool and he talked about lgbtq issues. He made all these things real to children and relatable. He put emotions behind their experiences. He welcomed all in a kind, gentle way and lived out the gospel in his hospitality and acceptance of all. He had a quiet courageousness and bravery that never turned away from the difficulties of being human on this planet. When he was before Congress asking them to provide the funding for his show he said this: This is what I give. I give an expression of care every day to each child, to help him realize that he is unique. I end the program by saying, "You've made this day a special day, by just your being you. There's no person in the whole world like you, and I like you, just the way you are." And I feel that if we in public television can only make it clear that feelings are mentionable and manageable, we will have done a great service for mental health. I think that it's much more dramatic that two men could be working out their feelings of anger -- much more dramatic than showing something of gunfire.

Like Abraham Mr. Roger’s devoted his life not just to this children’s show but he lived out his whole life in faithfulness. He was not acting out a part for television he was his true authentic self at all times. His show lasted for 34 years.

Mr. Rogers did far more than give a glass of cold water to the disciples; he fed them and the children. He nourished them and opened their eyes and showed us how to love one another. What a gift he was to us. At a time when this nations’ values seem to be focused on things that are not good for anyone’s overall health and definitely not on building relationships, I think it’s important to know that it is possible. It is possible to live out our faithfulness to God by building relationships with all people, by including all people in the vast wealth of this nation, by repairing the breach of 100’s of years of enslavement and by restoring hope to the poor. Keep holding out your glass of water to those who need it. When we decided to become a food resource in northern Brown County a few weeks ago we found another way to nourish and love our neighbors. I’m so thankful to be part of a community of believers that is faithful to doing the work needed in our community. We are all tested at times in our journey to follow God. We have to make decisions daily about how we do this and how we make God’s voice and actions known in this world. It can be as simple as offering a glass of water to a thirsty person. It can be as difficult as speaking up to a racist. The one promise I remembered as I read the story of Abraham and Isaac this week is that God made a covenant to Abraham, Israel and to us that his son would be a leader of the tribes and carry on a people who believed in our one God…and God always keeps her covenants. God is always faithful and so we respond. “Here I am Lord”.