

On the Day My Missionary Son Departs

... seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son from me
—Genesis 22:12

Spoken by a father
who would have to watch his son, his only son,
be taunted and crucified
to a father who had to take his son and, despite all
he'd been promised,
lift his own hand up with a knife—
these words have nothing to do with me.

I've done this before. I know
the hard things coming to him, and to me,
are good things.
I know that if he were to choose to stay
out of fear (his or mine), neither of us
would be happier with our lives together here.
I know he will return
in some ways and not in others,
or he will not.
There are many kinds of violence, and chances of harm
are not greater there than here.

It's nothing like Abraham.

Only in this: covenants have been made.
Only in this: a mother waits at home
while big things happen
somewhere else.

—Darlene Young

This poem was a finalist in the 2024 BYU Studies Poetry Contest.