**March 29, 2020 Romans 12:1-12**

***Sacrifice***

**Scripture:** Romans 12:1-12 NRSV

*(1)I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. (2)Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God--what is good and acceptable and perfect. (3)For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of yourself more highly than you ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned. (4)For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, (5)so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another. (6)We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us: prophecy, in proportion to faith; (7)ministry, in ministering; the teacher, in teaching;  (8)the exhorter, in exhortation; the giver, in generosity; the leader, in diligence; the compassionate, in cheerfulness.  (9)Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; (10)love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honor. (11)Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord. (12)Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer.*

**Notes:**

1. ***Sacrifice*** is a regular part of the life of a disciple of Jesus.
   1. ***Worship*** isn’t just about a spiritual realm.
   2. ***Worship*** happens in us and the way we use our bodies.
   3. Living ***sacrifices*** are personified in the body of Christ
2. ***Community*** is the place where daily sacrifice happens.
   1. We give up what we ***want***, to live harmoniously with others.
   2. ***Humility*** enables us to give freely with nothing in return.
3. ***Community*** is where each of us is able to use our gifts.
   1. It takes a ***sacrifice***, we must be willing to serve.
   2. Our gifts align with our ***passions***, not our comfort zone.
4. ***Community*** helps us learn to celebrate the gifts of others.
   1. ***Love*** is a key component to a sanctified life.
   2. We must be devoted to one another in ***love***.
   3. ***Love*** is the ultimate example of sacrifice.
   4. CS Lewis wrote, “To love at all is to be ***vulnerable***. Love anything and your heart will be wrung and possibly broken.”
5. We ***worship*** God by caring for others.
   1. ***Worship*** is an essential part of each of our lives
   2. ***Worship*** can sometimes be a difficult concept to grasp,
   3. ***Love*** and care for those around us, love God and ***worship*** Him with our lives.

**Transcript:**

Sacrifice; it feels like a bit of an archaic word. We live in a world where anything is possible. If you can imagine it, somebody can create it. So sacrifice, or to do without something seems so ancient. I live in a world where I can get anything I want, and get it when I want. I go online to amazon, search for what I want; and with a few clicks of the keyboard, it will be delivered in one to two days. I am able to access any movie and most tv shows I want to watch, I go to Netflix or any of the other streaming services, do a search for the show I want to watch, and if I am willing to pay the price or know where to look I can be watching it in a few minutes, many times commercial free.

Yet in the last few weeks we have begun to experience the pinch from what we cannot control. We are asked to make sacrifices; stay home, keep your distance (6 feet) from others, only purchase what you need from the stores, do not hoard up items that you do not need, leave a little something for the next person in line. If you are sick, with a fever, cough, shortness of breath, diarrhea, do not go out in public for the safety of others; do not go out in public for your own protection. We are asked to sacrifice our freedoms, so somebody else can maintain theirs; sacrifice or own pleasure so others need not worry.

Our passage today in Romans 12 talks about sacrifices. But not the types of sacrifices one may think of. It is not talking about sacrifices like those in the Old Testament scriptures. We don’t bring animals into the temple to slaughter them, we don’t build an altar in the wilderness to atone for our sins. But sacrifice is one of the main themes of the Lenten season. Fasting, or giving up something, is a form of sacrifice. We sacrifice something in order that we may create space to hear God more clearly. We remove things that might be hindering our walk with God so we can learn more about our dependence on God. And, of course, the entire walk through Lent is a journey toward the cross, which represents the ultimate sacrifice for the whole world.

But sacrifice is not meant only for the Lenten season; it is supposed to be part of the regular life of a servant of God, and disciple of Jesus. In fact, Paul says in the text today that our bodies are to be presented to God as living sacrifices. Worship is embodied in us and in the ways we sacrifice our lives daily for the kingdom of God. So would you turn with me to our sermon passage, found in Romans 12:1-12, and share with me in the reading of God’s Word.

(1)I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. (2)Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God--what is good and acceptable and perfect. (3)For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of yourself more highly than you ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned. (4)For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, (5)so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another. (6)We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us: prophecy, in proportion to faith; (7)ministry, in ministering; the teacher, in teaching;  (8)the exhorter, in exhortation; the giver, in generosity; the leader, in diligence; the compassionate, in cheerfulness.  (9)Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; (10)love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honor. (11)Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord. (12)Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer. Romans 12:1-12 NRSV

This passage in Romans is about worship being embodied by us. The idea that worship isn’t just about a spiritual realm, but also the relevancy of what happens with our body. How we demonstrate a worship to God, in the day to day activities that we perform. In our private lives; when we are alone with only God, and in public, how we demonstrate our love for Christ in everything we do. While a spiritual act of worship might feel a bit mystical in tone, our bodies are not mystical. “True and proper” worship is both physical and spiritual. It requires the focus of our minds and spirit, as well as the focus of our activities. Worship is not just something that happens “out there.” It’s something that happens in here, something that happens within us, and the ways in which we use our bodies to demonstrate our worship to God.

Paul seems to be expanding on the idea of the Shema (Deuteronomy 6:5), loving God with all your heart, soul, and strength. It is an act of worship to use, not only your spirit, but also your body in worship. “Heart” and “soul” focus on a more mystical side of worship, but “strength” seems to emphasize that our physical bodies are very much a part of worship.

Jesus also expanded more deeply on this issue of worshiping with our whole selves in Luke 10:27 where he said, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind; and, love your neighbor as yourself.” “Mind” is not in the original Shema text, but Jesus seems to expand that command to communicate that all of our beings, every part of us, are involved in the worship of God. Jesus also talks about loving your neighbor, which Paul talks about later in our text as well. Ultimately, being a living sacrifice encompasses caring for others.

Living sacrifices are also personified in the body of the church, the body of Christ. It is important to note that, even though we often want to individualize this passage, the text is always in the plural. This is a message not just for us as individuals; but for *us*, the church, as an embodied community of faith. “Brothers and sisters, present your *(plural)* bodies” these are all plural words. Paul is not imploring that one of us must be a living sacrifice, He is stating that body of the church and every person who is a part of the body of Christ must submit our lives as a living sacrifice.

Community is generally the place where daily sacrifice happens. Living in community with others is difficult, and in order to make it work, we often have to give up what we want, in order to live harmoniously with others. This is probably why Paul reminded the believers not to think more highly of themselves than they ought. Thinking you are better than others is a quick way to dissolve community. If you think you are better than others, even in your own home, you begin thinking you don’t need to clean up after yourself, or you don’t need to contribute. You will soon find yourself in conflict with others.Take these ideas and place them on a larger scale within a faith community. It is difficult to live in community with arrogant people, people who think they are above the work needed in the community, people who think they are above contributing to the common good of the whole body.Selfishness creates discord, not community. When you think of yourself with humility, you are able to serve in life-giving ways. This enables us to give freely without expecting anything in return from others. Humility enables things to run smoothly, humility cultivates cooperation, humility empowers community.

Community is where each of us is able to use our gifts. People are different and have different gifts. Community is the place where those gifts are able to be used, many times to their greatest abilities. It takes a sacrifice to use our gifts, at times. We have to put ourselves out there. We must be willing to serve, serving in ways that, while we may be gifted, we may not be comfortable. Often our gifts line up with our passions, but they don’t always line up with our comfort zone. We may have a gift of leadership, but we are hesitant to use it, maybe because others are already leading or maybe because we’ve never had the opportunity. At times, it takes sacrifice to push ourselves to use our gifts. We have to take the time to know what our gifts are. It takes time, energy, and sometimes trial and error to find where our gifts are. This can be a painful process of sacrifice.

Allowing and encouraging others to use their gifts can at times be a sacrifice on our part. If we are great at teaching, and someone else is as well, we may have to take the time to mentor them and even step out of our places of service, to give others a chance to use their gifts. We have to forego our own jealousy of the gifts of others; times that we look upon others’ gifts with envy. Community helps us learn to celebrate the gifts of others. When one person uses their gifts, it benefits everyone in the community. Gifts edify and build up the community. Most of our gifts are not meant to be hoarded or are impossible to hoard. It’s difficult to be a leader without people to lead. It’s difficult to be an encourager without people to encourage. It is even difficult to preach when the sanctuary is empty; but as I look out over these empty seats, I see your smiling faces, and the faces of those who have joined us on facebook and other forms of social media, so I am reminded I am not preaching to the empty room. I am preaching to each of you. Community gives us the space and the opportunity to use our gifts.

Being a living sacrifice is about sanctification. Those who follow after Christ exhibit qualities of a living sacrifice. Paul explains that sincere love is an expression of a living sacrifice. Love is a key component to a sanctified life. Love is what enables us to care well for the community of faith. Love helps us serve with humility; love helps us use our gifts well. Sincere love means it’s genuine and earnest. We are authentic in our love toward others. This connects us back to the embodiment of worshiping Christ. We love God with our heart, soul, mind, and strength, and we love our neighbor as ourselves.

Love is so emphasized that it is mentioned again in how we must be devoted to one another in love. This reemphasizes the ways that we celebrate the gifts of others and live in community. When we look farther on in the context of our passage, we also see more examples of exhibiting love. Blessing others, even those who persecute us, rejoicing and mourning with others, living in harmony with one another, not repaying evil for evil, living at peace with others, feeding your enemy and giving them something to drink, overcoming evil with good. These are examples of exhibiting love and they are consistent with “love your neighbor as yourself” in Luke 10:27, which leads into the story of the good Samaritan. This idea of embodied worship is fleshed out fully by loving your neighbor and loving them well.

Love is the ultimate example of sacrifice. 1 Corinthians 13 helps illustrate the qualities of love, many of which involve sacrifice. We know through the loving relationships we have with others; whether children, a spouse, or another person, that love almost always involves sacrifice. CS Lewis wrote, “To love at all is to be vulnerable. Love anything and your heart will be wrung and possibly broken.” While love might be the most emphasized part of a living sacrifice, several other qualities are listed as well; hate what is evil and cling to what is good, honor others above yourselves, keep your zeal for the Lord, be joyful in hope, be patient in affliction, be faithful in prayer, care for others through hospitality.

Out of the overflow of our love for God, we worship God by caring for others. We worship God by doing for others; even when they are undeserving. All of the above qualities are ways that we worship God with our embodied lives. Worship is what we do to demonstrate our love for God, for Jesus. Worship is not just a few songs we sing on Sunday Morning. Worship is not just standing up and sharing a few words of praise to the Lord. Worship is an essential and integral part of the lives of those who follow Jesus. Worship is an essential and integral part of each of our lives. We worship God with our very real, embodied lives and we worship God in the ways that we love and care for those around us.

Worship can sometimes be a difficult concept to grasp, in much the way that sacrifice can feel archaic. But the way we worship is through the way we live; not just on Sunday but every day. Are You loving God with all of your heart, soul, mind, and strength? Are you loving those around you? Not just your family; not just your friends, and not just those who live in your community. Are you loving those you come into contact with in the rest of your travels; the strangers at the store; those who work in your building, those who sit on street corners because they have no home? When we care and love all of these I have mentioned, and when we love them well, we are offering our lives as a sacrifice to God.

Journeying through Lent is not just about the practice of fasting; it’s also about adding spiritual practices into our lives. Many people used to fast from food in order to use the money for the poor. This is still a good practice. As we learn to love and care for those around us more, we learn to love God and worship with our lives.