**February 25 2024 Romans 12:1–21**

***True Worship***

**Scripture:**

*(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. (13)Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers. (14)Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. (15)Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. (16)Live in harmony with one another; do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly; do not claim to be wiser than you are. (17)Do not repay anyone evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all. (18)If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. (19)Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave room for the wrath of God; for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord." (20)No, "if your enemies are hungry, feed them; if they are thirsty, give them something to drink; for by doing this you will heap burning coals on their heads." (21)Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.*

*Romans 12:1-21 NRSV*

**Notes:**

1. *“…Present your* ***bodies*** *as a living sacrifice…”* 
   1. “***Sacrifice***” is a fairly common part of our vocabulary.
   2. ***Sacrifice*** isn’t meant to be easy!
   3. Sacrifice costs us ***something***, which makes it hard.
2. Physical ***Bodies*.** 
   1. The Apostles’ Creed affirms the ***resurrection*** of the body.
   2. Bodies ***matter*** to God, meaning they should ***matter*** to us!
   3. ***Worship*** involves our bodies!
3. Living ***Sacrifices*.** 
   1. A living sacrifice doesn’t ***conform*** to this world.
   2. “*Do not think more highly of* ***yourself*** *than you ought*.”
   3. Don’t be ***arrogant*** about who you are.
   4. Use your gifts and talents for the ***betterment*** of others.
   5. Work ***together*** as the body of Christ.
4. Spiritual ***Disciplines*.** 
   1. Put into practice spiritual ***disciplines***.
   2. The way we use our ***bodies*** can draw us closer to God.
   3. We are ***dependent*** on God and a community of faith.
5. Find God’s will by living in ***intentional*** ways that set us apart.
   1. Be in the ***center*** of God’s will.
   2. How is God ***calling*** ***you*** to be a living sacrifice?
   3. This living out of faith, is a true ***act*** of ***worship*** to God.
   4. It costs us something, but it’s ***true*** and ***proper*** worship.

**Script:**

Today’s Sermon is about worship. One of my favorite songs about worship begins like this;

*When the music fades,*

*all is stripped away and I simply come;*

*Longing just to bring something that's of worth,*

*that will bless Your heart;*

*I'll bring You more than a song*

*for a song in itself is not what You have required;*

*You search much deeper within,*

*through the way things appear;*

*You're looking into my heart;*

*I'm coming back to the heart of worship,*

*and it's all about You all about You Jesus;*

*I'm sorry Lord for the thing I've made it,*

*when it's all about You all about You Jesus*

Have you ever engaged in worship so deep that music was not needed. The words were not needed. The worship was just you, standing there before the Lord in humble submission. Bearing your heart and soul to the lord, not holding anything back, surrendering to his will and his way.

I believe one of the reasons I like this song so much is because that is what it is talking about; humble submission to the Lord, a sacrifice of self so that you may be immersed into his presence. Have you ever felt that type of worship? Have you ever experienced something so … GLORIOUS? Today as we look at true worship we will be reading from Romans 12. If you have your bibles, stand with me and turn to Romans 12:1-21, and share 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. (13)Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers. (14)Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. (15)Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. (16)Live in harmony with one another; do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly; do not claim to be wiser than you are. (17)Do not repay anyone evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all. (18)If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. (19)Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave room for the wrath of God; for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord." (20)No, "if your enemies are hungry, feed them; if they are thirsty, give them something to drink; for by doing this you will heap burning coals on their heads." (21)Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good. Romans 12:1-21 NRSV*

*“…Present your bodies as a living sacrifice…”* “Sacrifice” is a fairly common part of our vocabulary, it’s often used in conjunction with family life. Parents are told they must sacrifice things in order to raise good children. Whether that’s quiet and relaxing vacations, using the bathroom alone, or sleeping through the night, parents certainly do make sacrifices. Sacrifice is also required in order to have a good relationship with a spouse. Sometimes you sacrifice the time you would like to spend on yourself, because your spouse needs you. Or you sacrifice a job you like in order to give your spouse an opportunity to pursue a career they find fulfilling.

But you also must sacrifice to go back to school, to move somewhere new, or to take a dream vacation. Usually choosing one thing means sacrificing something else. Life is filled with sacrifices. Sacrifice isn’t meant to be easy! It’s supposed to cost us something. The imagery of sacrifice in the Old Testament involves blood, death, and fire; definitely not ease and comfort. In one story, King David wants to dedicate a field to the Lord, and the owner of the field offers to give it to David for free, but David’s response is that he will not offer the Lord something that costs him nothing.

Sacrifice costs us something, something which makes it hard. Something which means our text in Romans 12 is difficult. We sacrifice our **Physical Bodies.** We are told that offering our bodies as a living sacrifice is “*true and proper worship*.” That means that our physical bodies matter. Sometimes we are tempted to elevate the spirit over the body, to say that the body doesn’t matter, only the spirit, but this impulse is not in line with Christian tradition.

The Apostles’ Creed affirms the resurrection of the body. The incarnation shows us how much bodies matter to God because God chose to become a human with a body. Jesus actually died in the body, and he actually rose again, with a body. During his ministry, Jesus demonstrated that he cared about bodies by feeding them, healing them, and existing in one.

Bodies matter to God, which means they should matter to us! It might be easier to imagine “living sacrifice” as a spiritual command rather than a physical one, but it isn’t. What we do with our bodies, how we exist in our bodies, and how we treat our bodies, as well as how we treat the bodies of others, all matter.

What we do with our bodies is connected to worship because there is no such thing as worship that is not embodied. When we worship, we sing, we move, we pray, we stand, we sit, and we stand again, we listen, we read, we taste, we touch. Worship involves our bodies! Worship and our bodies are also connected in the ways we care for others: clothing the naked, visiting the sick and imprisoned, offering food and water to those without it. These are all ways that we use our bodies to worship God by caring for the bodies of others.

We must make **Living Sacrifices.** Being a living sacrifice means we don’t conform to the patterns of this world. The patterns of this world include desiring power, wealth, fame, beauty. If we don’t conform to those patterns, then we: Do not hate, mistreat, or abuse our bodies if they don’t look the right way; Do not use our bodies to get ahead; Do not treat other people’s bodies as means to an end for ourselves.

Verse 3 also comes into play: “*Do not think more highly of yourself than you ought*.” Don’t create a hierarchy where you are better than others. The early church focused on pushing against the hierarchy-based systems of the day, which meant that early Christian congregations were made up of people from all over the social spectrum, when normally they would be expected to be separated out by status. Don’t be arrogant about who you are. Titles and social class are irrelevant in the kingdom of God. We each have different gifts, and we are expected to use those gifts to build up the body of Christ whether serving, preaching, encouraging, or any of the other many gifts God has bestowed upon God’s people.

Being a living sacrifice means offering our gifts in unselfish ways to the community of faith and people around us. We use our gifts and talents for the betterment of others instead of as a way to get ahead. We also recognize where we are *not* gifted, and allow others who *are* gifted in ways we are not to flourish and thrive. We need one another. Humility creates space for us to work together as the body of Christ. Being a living sacrifice is ultimately centered in love. Love in this text is described in embodied ways: Being joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer; Sharing with those in need, practicing hospitality; Blessing those who persecute us; Rejoicing with those who rejoice, mourning with those who mourn; Living in harmony with one another and not being conceited; Not repaying evil for evil but doing what is right; Living at peace with everyone; Not taking revenge on our enemies.

This brings us to our acts of **Spiritual Disciplines.** During Lent we take intentional time to put into practice embodied spiritual disciplines; like fasting. The way we use our bodies can draw us closer to God and to one another, or further away. When we engage in spiritual disciplines, we are reminded that we are dependent on God and on a community of faith. We aren’t meant to do it alone.

Taking time to intentionally set our bodies aside as living sacrifices through spiritual disciplines is also a great time to ask questions of ourselves: What gifts do I have to contribute to the body of Christ? Where do I need to live more humbly with others? Am I living at peace with others? Am I being overcome by evil, or overcoming evil with good? Am I rejoicing with those who rejoice and mourning with those who mourn?

Verse 2 tells us that if we are living sacrifices, sacrifices who aren’t conformed to the patterns of the world, we “will be able to test and approve what God’s will is his good, pleasing and perfect will.” In this season of Lent, we long for God to reveal God’s will to us, but we find God’s will when we live in intentional ways that set us apart. We discover the gifts that we have that are to be used for the sake of others. When we live lives of embodied love to the world around us, we are in the center of God’s will.

How is God calling you to be a living sacrifice? Sacrifice might look different for you than it does for someone else. It might be deciding to put yourself and your gifts out there for the first time. That can be a hard and scary thing to do. It could be taking time out of your day or week to do something for someone else. It could just be taking time to discover what you are gifted at in the first place so you can better serve in that capacity.

But this living out of faith, this caring for one another, this humbling of ourselves; this is a true act of worship to God. It costs us something, but it’s also true and proper worship.