

Romans 12:1-8 Offer yourself as a living sacrifice 23 /08/26

Prayer: Lord direct us by your Holy Spirit as we seek to learn and grow from your word this morning. In Jesus name. Amen.

Father,

We offer ourselves to you as a living sacrifice through Jesus Christ our Lord. Send us out in the power of your Spirit to live and work to your praise and glory.

We say this prayer at the end of most communion services. Did you know that it comes from Romans 12? Do you really think about what it means to offer yourself as a living sacrifice? Or do you just recite it without thinking too much about it? The second half of that prayer is perhaps easier to understand, *send us out in the power of your Spirit to live and work to your praise and glory.*

We need to offer ourselves before being sent out.

How do you feel about being a living sacrifice?

What does the word sacrifice conjure up in your mind?

Do you think of the Old Testament animal sacrifices, offered in worship or seeking forgiveness from God; do you think of Abraham's willingness to offer his son Isaac as a sacrifice in obedience to God, who then stepped in and provided a ram instead? Or do you think of Jesus on the cross who God sent as the once for all sacrifice that our sins may be forgiven? //

Have you ever sacrificed something important or valuable to you for the sake of someone else? Some mothers may feel they sacrifice a career when they choose to have a family, parents generally sacrifice time and money for their children. I heard of someone this week sacrificing a much longed for holiday to Europe to care for someone who suddenly needed her care.

Sacrifice involves giving up something for a higher purpose. Jesus offered up his life so that we might be forgiven and receive eternal life. As Christians it means surrendering ourselves and our own desires to honour God, to worship him and follow him, seeking to be obedient to his good will.

In Romans 12 Paul urges his readers, those who are in Christ, to offer our bodies as a living sacrifice. To surrender ourselves to God as an act of worship, holy and pleasing to him.

As we come to this chapter there is a shift in this letter to the Romans. Paul has been explaining the gospel, the Christian faith, speaking of God's grace and mercy. Of how we are saved by faith and not by works. He has said that those who believe in Jesus are

adopted into his family. He has said that nothing can separate us from God's love, and that there is no condemnation for those in Christ.

Considering all he has been saying up to now, he says *therefore, in view of God's mercy* we are to offer ourselves to him. In these last few chapters, Paul will be encouraging us how to live as faithful, Spirit filled Christians, to live different lives to the world around us, to use our God given gifts to build up the church in unity and humility.

We do this, not by following rules and laws, but out of our gratitude for God's great love and mercy, we do it by following and imitating Jesus. Living as God's children.

What does this offering look like?

How do we present our bodies as a living sacrifice?

Note, ours is a living, breathing, moving sacrifice. It does however entail some death; that is, dying to ourselves and our selfish desires.

As Paul says in 1 Corinthians 6 our bodies are the temple of the Holy Spirit. So don't use it for sexual immorality or gluttony – drinking too much wine, eating too much food. Enjoy sex in marriage and food and wine and coffee but always ensure you are honouring God in the way you do these things. Be thankful and generous. Don't let lies, bitterness, envy or anger come out of your mouth, don't use your fists to hurt others.

Rather, as John Stott writes in his commentary on Romans...

Christian sanctity shows itself in the deeds of the body. So we are to offer the different parts of our bodies not to sin as 'instruments of wickedness' but to God as 'instruments of righteousness'. Then our feet will walk in his paths, our lips will speak the truth and spread the gospel, our tongues will bring healing, our hands will lift up those who have fallen, and perform many mundane tasks as well like cooking and cleaning, typing and mending; our arms will embrace the lonely and the unloved, our ears will listen to the cries of the distressed, and our eyes will look humbly and patiently towards God.

Paul then says *do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.*

What does transformation look like? For a Christian it means a deep, inside-out spiritual change. Through his Spirit, God changes a person's core heart, mind, and identity to match the likeness of Jesus Christ, moving us away from worldly ways and toward holiness. The Greek word is metamorphosis, like the process of a caterpillar changing into a butterfly. Like a butterfly, Paul in 2 Corinthians talks about us being new creations in Christ. We can live our life in freedom, spreading our wings and flying for the joy we have in Jesus. People should see us as beautiful, transformed people.

Paul had a powerful and dramatic encounter with Jesus and his life was totally turned around. We might not have had such an experience, but our lives should show that we have met Jesus, that we are following and imitating him and not the world. We are not to come to church on Sunday and go home and live like the world the rest of the week.

What in this world's culture do you find it hard to turn from? The pursuit of wealth, seeking pleasure in places that are not Godly? For the world will tell you everything is ok if it doesn't hurt someone else. Maybe you have addictions you need to turn from, or anger, or holding on to grudges. Maybe it's individualism, thinking that you don't need anyone else and or always putting yourself first.

Unlike an initial encounter with Jesus, transformation is an ongoing surrender to God and his ways, through humility and prayer. Through the renewing of your mind, choosing to align yourself with God's good and pleasing will. And we can't do that in our own power and strength, but by relying on God and asking the Holy Spirit, who Jesus sent to live in us, to help us and change us. The Holy Spirit will teach us God's will.

We also do this in community – as the body of Christ, supporting one another. Not seeing ourselves or anyone else as better than someone else.

We say it in our liturgy most weeks – that *We are the body of Christ*, with the response, *his Spirit is with us*. Look around you, we are all part of Christ's body, the Church.

Our physical body is one body with many different parts that have different but very important functions, none better than the rest, all make up the whole. Paul talks more about this in his first letter to the Corinthians, chapter 12. Feet, legs, arms, mouths, tongue, organs etc. All are necessary for the body to work in the best possible way.

Likewise in the church, we are all needed and valued, we may have differences, we may have different gifts, but we are all part of the body of Christ, and Paul says each member belongs to the others. We belong to each other, along with our brothers and sisters in other denominations and those Christians all around the world. We belong to a big, colourful body. A messy body that doesn't always work well together, but God's plan and his desire is that we would work in love and unity, respecting the other parts that look different to us. (We have an opportunity to worship as a combined parish next week, and with our fellow believers from other denominations on 4th October at the Adventure Resort)

We are to support each other, encourage one another, build one another up.

We are to use the gifts that God has given us for his glory. Paul just lists seven examples in this letter, prophesying, teaching, encouraging, leading, serving, showing mercy.

You will find others listed in his first letter to the Corinthians 12, and in Ephesians 4. These are not exhaustive lists.

What gifts has God given you? Paul says that we are to *use* our gifts, don't let them lie dormant; *if it is serving, then serve well, if it is to encourage, then give encouragement, if it is giving, then give generously...*

We do all this as *we offer ourselves as living sacrifices to God, for him to send us out in the power of the Spirit to live and work to his praise and glory.*

We all have gifts to use, some are natural everyday gifts, maybe you are talented in music, or maths, art or cooking, administration; others might be specific supernatural gifts God has given you, but they are all gifts from God. If you don't know what yours are, ask God to show you, or ask someone who knows you, they can probably tell you.

Most of you do use your gifts in this congregation serving in many ways, music, morning tea, welcoming, showing care and compassion for one another, giving encouragement, smiling at someone, showing God's love. And many are generous givers, thank you. As soon as a response to a need is noted, money starts pouring in. Like money for the X-ray machine in Nepal, or for building works like the hall renovation. I hope showing God's mercy is something we will all do- cheerfully because we know God's great mercy to us.

And remember that you are important to the whole body of Christ, no member greater than the other. As Paul says, *do not think of yourself more highly than you ought*, but I say neither think of yourself more lowly than you ought. Every one of you are needed. *We* are the body of Christ. How precious is that?

As we say these words as part of our regular worship, let's renew our minds with them, let's say them meaningfully and prayerfully. In fact, this sending out prayer is a great one to say every day...

Join with me now...Father

We offer ourselves to you as a living sacrifice through Jesus Christ our Lord. Send us out in the power of your Spirit to live and work to your praise and glory. Amen.