

Trinity Lutheran Church, Gillette, WY  
August 24, 2008

Living Sacrifice

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God, our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, amen. The text for the sermon this morning comes from the Epistle, which was read earlier.

Looking around here, I notice all sorts of people. We have everything from infants to the elderly and everything in between. While each of us is different, we all go by the same name: Christian. But we have to ask the question, what type of Christian are you? Are you the “Sunday Christian”, are you the “Twice-a-year Christian” or are you the “Everyday of the year and then some Christian?” God does not want us to be the first two types of Christians. Paul tells us in today’s text to offer our bodies as *“a living sacrifice.”* A living sacrifice is not a “you must,” “you ought,” or “you should.” It is more than a grain offering or an animal sacrifice like those in the Old Testament, but a sacrifice of ourselves – our gifts, our talents, and our God-given blessings.

These living sacrifices are holy and pleasing to God. This is what God wants from us. He has given us all talents and gifts and He wants us to use them to further the work of His kingdom. Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ gave to us the greatest of all living sacrifices: He traded His life to save us from sin, death, and the devil. He traded His life so that you and I might have everlasting life. He traded His perfect life for our sin-ridden life. Paul speaks about our *“bodies as a living sacrifice.”* It is *“holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.”* Before we go any further, let us ask the good Lutheran question, “What does this mean?” It means more than just simple recitation of words and sitting in a pew for one hour a week. Worship is an attitude of the

heart, an attitude of giving praise and glory to God our Father, who gives gifts of mercy and forgiveness to us. Paul is teaching the Romans that this attitude is to be our constant companion, all the days of our life.

The power of self-sacrifice is really the power of love: real love, Christian love. In fact, self-sacrifice is the center and content of genuine love, the kind we see in the crucified Christ. When urging Christian people on to new heights, new levels of sanctification, we do well to copy Paul's way of admonishing. It has well been said that "you must," "you ought," "you should," are not proper terms for sanctification motivation. Far better it is to point away from the Christian, and to point instead to Christ. Consider God's mercy. Think of the supreme sacrifice that He made on our behalf.

When we think of the magnitude of Christ's sacrifice, we look at the sacrifices that we make. Regardless of our sacrifices, they fail in comparison to the sacrifice that Christ made. But with that said, that doesn't mean that our sacrifices need to be any less than our best. Our sacrifice should be more than just mediocre. For the Christians in Rome that Paul is addressing, it would be life for life. Christ gave them His. Now they would give Him theirs in service. This living sacrifice would be holy and pleasing to the Lord, a sacrifice of thanksgiving. This lifelong sacrifice would be their "*spiritual worship.*" We are called to live a life worthy of what we have received in Christ. Yes, God has given us Jesus as a gift; freely and purely out of grace.

We must admit that it is easier said than done to live a life worthy of what we have received in Christ. The reason why this is so difficult to do is because we have to deal with the world. What makes up the world? Sin. Everywhere we turn, there it is.

Our lives are nothing but sin. But there is a way out of that world. We are freed from the world of sin by the blood of Jesus Christ, shed for all of us on a cross. This will cause a spiritual transformation by the means of grace, a move away from the conforming to the world.

For people who are new to the Christian faith, Paul proceeds to spell out what a fitting living sacrifice and “spiritual worship” will and won’t include. It is dangerously easy for believers living in an age that is soft on sin to share the same lax attitude toward sin – be it immorality, greed, materialism or some other form of lovelessness. Therefore Paul reminds the readers that certain behavior is now off limits. In fact, believers are to be non-conformists; Christians are not to conform to the world’s pattern of rebellion against God’s Word.

So it should be for us today as well. By heeding the words of Paul, by not conforming any longer to the things of this world, we see more than just the Law in front of us, our fall into sin, our failure to do what God commands of us, and we begin to see the Gospel before us, the gift of life everlasting through Christ. We see that we are more than just sinners in a sinful world. We see that we are redeemed children of God. We see that we are more than just our own self; we are a member of the body of Christ. Paul has been speaking about transformation, about renewal. Now he gets to the first specific fruit that he desires to see as the result of such renewal. He wants to see a Christian congregation filled with a spirit of unity and God-pleasing harmony. Yet, he embarks upon some advice that people might be tempted to tune out.

The advice he gives at this point is seconded by the renewed Christian mind. No unbeliever wants to swallow the idea that he or she isn’t extremely important. Paul

speaks here against pride. One has to wonder whether pride doesn't cause more damage in the Christian congregation than any other particular sin. Isn't it pride that can keep people apart for years on end? Remembering how many congregations Paul came into contact with, knowing how often he was the arbitrator of disputes, we can imagine that Paul knew how many troubles and long-term feuds could be extinguished, if only people would put aside their pride. That is why Paul encouraged the members of the young congregation in Rome to use their sanctified Christian common sense. When the inevitable comparisons would arise between the different members of the congregation, each one was to remember, *"There but for the grace of God go I."*

As members of the body of Christ, there is a certain expectation placed upon us. That expectation is to be holy. The apostle Peter writes, *"As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct."* We are not capable, by our own means, to be holy; our sin prohibits that. However, in Christ Jesus, our Lord, we are indeed made holy. We are given all the blessings which God had meant for us at the time of creation: to be sinless and holy and to live with Him in everlasting righteousness.

Most of us have heard the saying "A house divided against itself cannot stand." That is how the body of Christ is. One part cannot carry the entire body, nor can the body exist without the one body part. The same holds true for us now. We cannot live without fellow Christians who strengthen us daily. We all sin and need repentance. Our brothers and sisters in Christ help give us the support network that we need to live a godly life. At the same time, the body cannot exist without Christ as the head. Christ is at the head of the body when we gather as fellow believers in Him, to hear the sweet

sound of the Gospel and to receive the gift of His body and blood, given and shed for the forgiveness of our sins. Through this practice of spiritual worship, we are strengthened – both as individuals and as the body of Christ. In Jesus’ name, amen. Now the peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus, amen.