

## Romans 12:1-8

Therefore I urge you, brothers, by the mercies of God, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice—holy and pleasing to God—which is your appropriate worship. <sup>2</sup>Also, do not continue to conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, so that you test and approve what is the will of God—what is good, pleasing, and perfect.

<sup>3</sup>So by the grace given to me, I tell everyone among you not to think of yourself more highly than you ought, but think in a way that results in sound judgment, as God distributed a measure of faith to each of you. <sup>4</sup>For we have many members in one body, and not all the members have the same function. <sup>5</sup>In the same way, though we are many, we are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another.

<sup>6</sup>We have different gifts, according to the grace God has given us. If the gift is prophecy, do it in complete agreement with the faith. <sup>7</sup>If it is serving, then serve. If it is teaching, then teach. <sup>8</sup>If it is encouraging, then encourage. If it is contributing, be generous. If it is leadership, be diligent. If it is showing mercy, do it cheerfully.

## Living Sacrifices

### I.

Have you ever tried to analyze people just by looking at them and observing a few things about them? It might be while you are standing in line at the checkout counter. Perhaps you sit on a bench in the mall, or you are taking a walk through the sand on the beach.

Looking around at the people, in whatever the setting, you begin to try to think about what it is that makes them tick. Perhaps based on how they are dressed or the expressions on their faces or how they walk you begin to make some judgments.

It's not new, this people-watching. Jesus did it. As he was traveling around and teaching, preaching, and healing, he observed the crowds and said that they appeared to be like sheep without a shepherd (Matthew 9:35-38). On his last visit to the temple he sat with his disciples and watched the people pass by the offering box, dropping in their offerings. He pointed out to the disciples that a poor widow with her offering had a more God-pleasing offering than people who had given much larger offerings (Mark 12:41-44 & Luke 21:1-4).

### II.

People watching has its pitfalls, of course. It's easy to make snap judgments about someone that are totally wrong. The expression on a person's face gives you only a snapshot; it cannot tell that this individual is always grumpy. A person who is well-dressed *might* be a fine, upstanding member of the community, but might also just be a well-dressed reprobate. The relaxed person you saw at the beach might be so tightly-wound the rest of the time that they seem like they could explode.

Jesus had an advantage as he watched crowds of people milling around with a spiritual aimlessness and as he observed worshipers dropping coins into the offering box. He is God, and he could read their hearts.

Today's Second Lesson talks about offerings—at least, in a sense. Rather than getting caught in the trap of people-watching and evaluating the offerings of others, look at your *own* spiritual life.

“Do not continue to conform to the pattern of this world” (Romans 12:2, EHV). You are a Christian now. Perhaps you have been for a long time; maybe you are new to the faith. Common in every believer is the fact that we were born as unbelievers; there *was* an old way of life, whether short or long.

As a believer, certain things are now off-limits. Believers are not to conform to the pattern of this world. Weeks ago—the Fifth Sunday after Pentecost—Paul told us about the pattern of this world. “Sin entered the world through one man and death through sin, so also death spread to all people because all sinned” (Romans 5:12, EHV). Sin is rebellion against God. That pattern has continued from Adam right up through the present moment.

Even Christians still have the Old Sinful Nature. That nature cannot escape the pattern of this world. Yet—do Christians still conform to the patterns of this world willfully by allowing our minds and faith to rot wallowing in a sea of godless entertainment? Do we conform our minds to prevailing attitudes that lead away from Christ in social movements and causes? Do we blithely and blindly allow godless attitudes to creep into and overwhelm the public schools and every area of life?

### III.

“Be transformed by the renewal of your mind” (Romans 12:2, EHV). Be transformed is a beautiful picture. The Greek word for “transformed” is “metamorphosis.” The first thing that springs to mind is the transformation of a caterpillar into a beautiful butterfly. This word is the reason that the butterfly is a frequently-used Christian symbol—we are butterflies who have been transformed. What transformed us?

“Therefore I urge you, brothers, by the mercies of God...” (Romans 12:1, EHV). “Therefore” is a very important word, not to be overlooked. It points back to all the things Paul has said. Paul’s Letter to the Romans is a very important book of the Bible; it clearly explains God’s plan of salvation.

The Greek word for justify is used 28 times in the New Testament. Only four times is the word used by someone other than Paul. 11 of the 24 times Paul uses the word are in the Letter to the Romans. He uses the term in this sense: justify means that God *declares* us righteous because of what Jesus has done. *All* the instances of “justify” in Romans are before this point. Paul has spoken eloquently about the way we have come to faith. It is by the mercies of God. God, in his mercy, sent Jesus to undo everything started by Adam and Eve and perpetuated by each one of us. In mercy, God sent Jesus to be the necessary sacrifice for the sins of the world. We have spoken about this in the past weeks.

Jesus did it all. Jesus lived a perfect life for you. Jesus died an innocent death for you. Jesus rose again from the dead for you. Jesus ascended into heaven to prepare a place for you.

“Therefore...by the mercies of God” looks back to all that God has done for you in Christ Jesus.

### IV.

Now what?

“Therefore I urge you, brothers, by the mercies of God, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice—holy and pleasing to God—which is your appropriate worship” (Romans 12:1, EHV).

I said before that today’s Second Lesson is about offerings—in a sense.

Paul used the word “sacrifice.” In the Old Testament, sacrifices were animals offered up on the Lord’s altar, or measures of grain or oil from the harvest. He didn’t mean that kind of sacrifice.

Nor was he talking about the offerings you drop in the collection plates at the back of the church on your way in or out of worship today, or the 1's and 0's of the offerings you make through your online donations. Those are great. Those are useful to this congregation of believers to use for our own efforts to preach the gospel in this place and to send in our congregational mission offering to the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod, as we do on a regular basis. Those offerings, both here and to the synod, are used for the work of Christ’s Church on earth.

But that's not your *real* offering. The money you give to fund the work of the church is just the token of your appreciation. Perhaps the more you understand and appreciate what your Lord Jesus has done for you, the greater the percentage of your income you put in the offering plate will be, but it's *still* not your *real* offering.

Your *real* offering is everything about yourself—all that you are and all that you have. When you dedicate your all to the Lord, your whole life is an offering. Paul is speaking about sanctification—your life as a Christian. Paul calls this kind of offering “a living sacrifice.”

The offering of living sacrifice is your “appropriate” worship. The word translated “appropriate” means “carefully thought through.”

“I tell everyone among you not to think of yourself more highly than you ought, but think in a way that results in sound judgment, as God distributed a measure of faith to each of you” (Romans 12:3, EHV). Each person within Christ's Church is a valuable living sacrifice to God. Your carefully thought through offering of your living sacrifice is described by the rest of Paul's words in today's Second Lesson.

“For we have many members in one body, and not all the members have the same function. <sup>5</sup>In the same way, though we are many, we are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another” (Romans 12:4-5, EHV). The living sacrifices of each person who is a member of Christ's Church are important to the whole church.

“We have different gifts, according to the grace God has given us” (Romans 12:6, EHV). What difficulty we would have functioning if every one of us were an organist, or an usher, or had abilities to handle the property of the church, or any task you can think of.

“If the gift is prophecy, do it in complete agreement with the faith” (Romans 12:6, EHV). Especially in the Old Testament prophecy often included looking into the future but, at its essence, prophecy means speaking the truths of God's Word. Every one of us can do that. Do your prophesying “in complete agreement with the faith.” The more you study and understand God's Word, the better able you will be to clearly explain to others what the Bible teaches.

“If it is serving, then serve. If it is teaching, then teach” (Romans 12:7, EHV). “Serving” covers nearly every ability you might have; if there is something you can do from which the church can benefit, use it. Teaching is a gift like prophesying—the more you understand, the better you will become at teaching God's Word.

“If it is encouraging, then encourage. If it is contributing, be generous. If it is leadership, be diligent. If it is showing mercy, do it cheerfully” (Romans 12:8, EHV). Now is a time that many people can use encouragement. If you have that gift, contact your fellow believers and share words of encouragement to help them carry on.

Contributing. Jesus once pointed out the widow and her offering. If you are able to give, Paul simply says to be generous.

If you can lead, work hard at it. If you are able to show mercy, cheerfully lend someone a helping hand.

I don't need to go people-watching to know what makes you tick. You are a believer. You have seen the mercies of God poured out for you by Christ Jesus on the cross. I know that it is because of him that you offer yourselves—all that you have and all that you are—as living sacrifices. God bless all you do as a living sacrifice for him. Amen.