

# Written Copy: Romans 12:1-5 “Called to Be a Living Sacrifice”

13<sup>th</sup> Sunday @ Pentecost: Proper 16

Sunday, August 27<sup>th</sup>, 2023

## Text: Romans 12:1-5

<sup>1</sup> I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. <sup>2</sup> Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect. <sup>3</sup> For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned. <sup>4</sup> For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, <sup>5</sup> so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another

## The text's intent

Recognize that our God works in ways that are beyond our comprehension, figuring out, or passing judgment on. But He is at work to fulfill His promise of saving all Israel, both Jew and grafted in Gentile as the Creator, Savior, and Redeemer of all. We could never repay Him for His gracious gifts of life now, forgiveness of sins, salvation, and eternal life to come. In response Paul calls us to give ourselves (and not dead animals) as a living sacrifice to Him as a member of the body of Christ. As living sacrifices, we serve Him wherever our vocations take us. We do so through the gifts He blesses us with to serve in this way, seeing ourselves in humility not as better or more important than our fellow Christian, but a much-needed part of the whole. We are each given the measure of what He has chosen us to have to fulfill the role He has for us. We are to use our time, talents, and treasures in a sacrificial way in order to be His means in the hands of the Holy Spirit to keep one another in faith and call out to the unbelieving world by proclaiming the Gospel in word and deed. And as we serve in this way we ask ourselves if the ministry we are accomplishing serve His command to love God first and our neighbor as ourself.

## Focus Statement:

God who is the Creator, Sustainer, and Redeemer of all things works in ways that are beyond our understanding and judging. He has blessed us with life now, salvation, forgiveness of sins, and eternal life to come. He calls us into His Church to be His body at work to call all Israel into His eternal family. He graciously blesses each of us with gifts so that we can serve in the manner He chooses to fulfill His will that all be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God

## Function Statement:

### Why it's important to know:

We know that we cannot repay God for the gracious gifts He gives us and cannot earn our salvation. But we sometimes take that to mean we have no active part to play in the ministry He has called us into as a member of His Church. We can see ourselves as more or less important than our fellow brother or sister called to be an equal part of His Church

### What the hearer should do as a result:

Through the Spirit's ongoing baptismal work, see ourself in humility as a needed part of the whole, equally as important as our fellow brother/sister. As a living sacrifice, serving Him sacrificially in our vocations, we are His hand at work to keep one another in faith, and be a part of His ministry to call all Israel into His eternal family

**Subject Sentence: Living Sacrifice: our love response to His grace.**

## Introduction

Well, it's that time of year again, time for Fantasy Football. And your Pastor, just like last year, has signed up for two different leagues. One is made up of members of my home congregation where I attended before going to Seminary. The other is a group of fellow Pastors that I graduated with from Seminary. We don't play for money, just for fun, just for bragging rights. And I know it's wrong to brag, but guess who won first place in the Seminary League last year? (Hint: he's preaching at the pulpit this morning 😊)

For those of you who have never played, Fantasy Football involves each participant picking players for his own team out of all the active players in the NFL today. For the Seminary League we are doing an auction draft where we have a certain amount of money (figuratively, not literally) to spend to assemble our team. Each player, depending on how good he is, is assigned a suggested auction value. But as is true at any auction, the final price depends on how good he is expected to play, and how many people want him. With a limited budget it's impossible to draft a team that has all the best players. I will be in competition with 8 other guys to draft the best players possible for each position on offense. Now you could possibly draft the best quarterback available, but it might take all the money you have to outbid everyone else. That would mean the rest of your team is the garbage, back-up, non-productive players, since you have no money left to go after good players. Instead, you must look to get the best players you can, at a reasonable price, to fill out all the positions needed for your team. So, it's not about having the one great star, it's about having as many quality players as you can afford.

### **What is My Motivation to Serve as a Living Sacrifice?**

Paul in our Epistle Lesson is describing how God assembles workers for His Church. He's not looking for one star player, like the best pastor. He's not even looking for those that are already quality players to fill His team. In fact, following the analogy of the Fantasy Football draft, He chooses the dregs, the players that no one else would want, and He makes them stars-He makes them useful. He makes them His beloved precious children.

Take for example yourself. You weren't drafted by any Pastor or Elder or Church Council. You were drafted and brought into the body of Christ, which is the Church when the Holy Spirit worked faith in your heart through the Gospel. For some of us this happened at our baptism. Others left the fold for a while and were drafted (or as Paul said last week) grafted back into His body through the Gospel Message. Point is you didn't make a choice to be part of this team, this body; the Lord chose you. He chose you to be His precious child and guided you here to be a part of this congregation: Lamb of God. He worked through choices you may have thought were your own, But in ways that are beyond our understanding He guided and influenced your choices and decisions because He wanted to draft you onto the Lamb of God team.

None of us were worthy of being drafted. We were all the worse kind of players: faithless, unloving, and uncaring, thinking only of ourselves and what pleases us. But the LORD loved you and wanted you, nonetheless. Through a love that is beyond our comprehension He sent His Son to be the atoning sacrifice for your sins: for all the mistakes and bad plays and

fumbled balls and interceptions you made. He took all those and removed them from your record. And in their place, through the exchange that happens by faith, you receive His perfect record and are declared worthy enough to be on His team, His Church, the body of Christ on earth.

He didn't call you into His body because you were the best at anything. By ourselves You and I are not. Instead, before you were born, He decided to give you sufficient skills and talents for the role He chose for you to play to accomplish the work He wants to be done here in this place. And when He brought faith in Christ to bear upon your heart, along with the gift of faith, He gave you spiritual gifts to be used to glorify Him and serve Him in love and faithfulness.

We don't do this to be saved. As Paul says in **Romans 11:34-36** <sup>34</sup> **For who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been His counselor?** <sup>35</sup> **Or who has ever first given to Him, and has to be repaid?** <sup>36</sup> **For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen.** All the gifts we are given, including salvation, forgiveness of sins, and eternal life come to us undeserved and unearned. God the Son came to earth, climbed on the cross, died, and rose again not because we deserved such a gift. He did that simply because of who He is and because of His great love for us that is beyond our understating.

Football coaches have lots of advisors to help them put together their teams. Fantasy Football players use draft sheets where sports experts rank the best players according to their position. Our Lord has no advisor, nor does He need one. He is far greater than we could ever imagine, and His plan for you and His Church are often beyond our comprehension. As Luther said our God is the "Hidden God". He is far more than we can comprehend. But He reveals to us all we need to know to be saved and be a member of His Church, His team, through the revelation that is His word.

**Romans 12:1 Therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, I urge you to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God; this is your spiritual worship**

Football players agree to sign and play because it's how they earn a living. But that is not our motivation to serve in Christ's body, the Church. All that we are and have is an undeserved gift. We are called to serve by giving ourselves as living sacrifices. Here Paul is contrasting our service to what was expected in the Old Testament Church before the coming of Christ. Each person had to present an animal, that was killed and sacrificed on

the altar as the means for them to be right with God, have their sins continued to be forgiven, and so remain a member of His family, the Church. Our service is not to repay Him. That would be impossible. And we are not a dead offering, but a living sacrifice through which we express our love and thanks for all His gracious gifts that we could never repay Him for. It is part of our call to worship, praise, and serve Him as His precious and redeemed children.

## **How We Go About Serving as Living Sacrifices**

But just how are we supposed to go about serving as these living sacrifices? Football players are drafted to play specific roles as a part of a team according to their gifts and talents. No one is expected to fulfill all roles on the team or be involved in every play.

**Romans 12:3-5** <sup>3</sup> For by the grace given to me, I tell everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he should think. Instead, think sensibly, as God has distributed a measure of faith to each one. <sup>4</sup> Now as we have many parts in one body, and all the parts do not have the same function, <sup>5</sup> in the same way we who are many are one body in Christ and individually members of one another.

Paul is describing a similar situation in our fulfilling the roles of being living sacrifices. We do not serve in a solo role, but as one individual who is part of the bigger whole, as one member of the body of Christ that is composed of many other members, all serving alongside you as living sacrifices. We serve utilizing the talents and gifts given to us by the Spirit according to His mysterious council. We should not expect to have the same talent or gifts as the next person. Even so there may be others around you who have the same or a similar gift or talent but nuanced according to the Spirit's design and plan. He calls us to work together with them to accomplish the ministry He has in mind for us to do.

Think for example what is needed to put on a Fellowship Dinner. There are many of you who love to serve in the kitchen as cooks and food preparation. But not all have the same degree of knowledge and talent. Some are better at preparing different kinds of dishes. Some are better suited to actually do the cooking, while others are better at the prep and set up, and still others are better at the planning and buying of food, still others excel at decorating and setting up the Fellowship Hall. Others love to be a part of the clean-up crew. Still others have the talent of making and passing out flyers and inviting others within our congregation as well as those outside of it to come. All of these talents and gifts are needed. And all involve serving by sacrificing with their time, talents, and treasures as living sacrifices, not to serve or benefit themselves, but for the ministry of the Lord in this place. Could the Lord be calling you to serve in one of these ways?

Some of have the gift visitation: they love to visit with people. I am blessed to have members who will call, write letters, or stop by and see people who are homebound, hospitalized, and care facilities. Some of these are the Elders, but there are others among us who are just members who have a heart to visit and encourage those who really need it. They sacrifice their time to do so, and in doing so are being living sacrifices to serve their

Lord and Savior in this place. Could the Lord be calling you to serve as a living sacrifice in this way?

Some have the gifts and talents to care for this building. They serve on the yard crew keeping the lawn looking nice and the gardens looking beautiful. Others serve to keep the building in good shape, repairing things that are broken, building tables and things that are needed so we don't have to spend money buying them. They keep this place looking respectable and beautiful as their sacrifice of love and service to God, making this a hospitable place that honors our Lord and Savior who in a greater way makes us presentable to be members of His kingdom. Has the Lord given you talents and gifts to serve in his way as a living sacrifice?

There are those who serve during worship so that God's word can be heard among us and His sacraments presented. Those of you who serve as greeters, gatekeepers, sound and PowerPoint, organists, and altar guild all serve as living sacrifices where your gift of time and talents serve the Lord and the ministry He is doing in this place. Could the Lord be calling you to serve in this way as a living sacrifice?

### **The Work the Lord Does as We Serve as Living Sacrifices**

These are some of the things the Lord is doing through our service as Living Sacrifices. At the same time, what work is He doing in us? **Romans 12:2 Do not be conformed to this age, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may discern what is the good, pleasing, and perfect will of God.**

Through this work we do the Holy Spirit is at work in you to stop you from conforming to the attitude and ways of the sinful world. When we gather here for worship, He is at work to show us through the law how we are becoming too much like the world so that He can move us to repentance. Then through the proclamation of the Gospel we are being transformed into the perfect children of God He declares us to be by faith. It's an ongoing process. But here in His body we each have a role of encouraging one another as the Spirit does this ongoing baptismal work with us.

Together we gather to hear His words and meditate on them. And through that He works to reveal in our lives His good, perfect, and pleasing will. He is at work to show you the means and ways you can serve with your mouth and your hands to show God's love for our fellow members of this body of Christ, as well as those whom our Lord desires to call into our midst through the mysterious powerful work His Spirit does in the Gospel.

## **Conclusion**

In my Fantasy Football Seminary League I was able to put together a pretty good team last year. Who knows if I will be able to repeat. The odds are kind of against it. I don't have a satisfactory knowledge of the players, nor the time find out who is the best on my own. But the Lord knows each one of you. He called you not because you were the best. He makes you good enough to serve through His gifts of grace and the work of the Holy Spirit. He called you here not to sit on the bench but to take an active role as a living sacrifice serving Him. The best part is you do not do this to be saved. By faith in Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior you already have forgiveness of sins, salvation, and eternal life. He doesn't expect you to be perfect, no one is. He doesn't expect you to do everything, no one can or should. He calls you here to be a member of His body the Church in service to the world. And when you fail, He forgives you. And He keeps providing you with opportunities to use those talents and gifts He has given you so that all might hear the Gospel message and come to the knowledge that Peter was given in the Gospel Lesson, that they might know Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God, and by knowing have eternal life to come. Amen