

Proper 16 Year A

8/23/2020

Exodus 1:8-2:10; Psalm 124; Romans 12:1-8; Matthew 16:13-20

Rev. Mark A. Lafler

As we continue our journey through the book of Romans today...
we enter into a new section of St. Paul's letter.

The first 11 chapters are focused on the history and plan of God's
redemption... The story of the mercies of God...

(as Deacon Kim said last week – *Mercy matters.*)

The entirety of the book is on the graciousness of God.

The first 11 chapters though are how that grace plays out in our
understanding...

some might say more of a theological approach.

Way back in chapter one, beginning with creation and sin,

and then on to the story of Abraham and his calling,

the problem of sin and death...

and God's intervention of justification by the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on
the cross...

our call to live by the Holy Spirit in this walk of sanctification...

the hope of redemption from Romans 8,

and finally, the expounding of God's mercy especially as it pertains to
the people of Israel in chapters 9, 10, and 11.

Our text today...

Chapter 12 and the following chapters go a different route.

St. Paul begins to look at the grace of God and how it impacts our relationships in the church,
with people outside the church,
with the government,
and other structures of life.

Over the next few weeks as we wrap up our journey in Romans...
we are going to address what grace looks like in different relationships.

In our reading today, Paul begins with:

I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God...

In other words, on account of all that has preceded this next part...

In light of all that has been said...

All this theological build up...

By the mercies of God...

*...present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God,
which is your spiritual worship.*

Now there is a lot packed into this verse...

So, we are going to take a few minutes right here.

And the first thing to note is that it is temple language...

presenting a sacrifice...

is a temple act... steeped in the Old Testament...

Remember, St. Paul just spent the last three chapters with the question,

“What about Israel?”...

He is staying in that context...

But it's not any sacrifice...

it's not a lamb... it's not a dove. (as in the OT)

It's ourselves...

it is Christians... believers of Jesus Christ.

We are to present ourselves as a living sacrifice...

Which is an oxymoron...

Because a sacrifice is not alive.

It's been sacrificed... it's dead.

What Paul is doing here is that before we jump into how we are to share

God's wonderful grace in our lives with others...

we need to remember what our own perspective is...

And that is... being dead to ourselves.

It's as if he is reflecting back to Romans 6.

Romans 6:11 –

In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus.

It's back to our baptism... the sacrament of baptism.

Again Romans 6:(3-4) –

...don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.

We are to think of ourselves as dead to ourselves...

And alive to Christ Jesus...

Presenting ourselves as a living sacrifice...

Born anew in Jesus Christ.

St. Paul says it another way in his letter to the Galatians (Galatians 2:20)...

He wrote:

I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

And St. Paul gets this understanding from Jesus...

From the Gospel of Matthew...

Jesus told his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it...."

(Matthew 16:24-25)

You see we are to offer ourselves to God as a living sacrifice...

And we do this because of Jesus Christ sacrifice on the cross.

Which is why these very words are said in the Eucharist Prayers...

Very pointedly in our Rite 1 prayer...

The Celebrant prays:

And here we offer and present unto thee, O Lord, our selves, our souls, and bodies, to be a reasonable, holy and living sacrifice unto thee...

By receiving communion, we accept the sacrifice of Jesus Christ as a propitiation for our sins...

And we also recognize that we join in that sacrifice ourselves...

carrying our own cross...

so that we may live for God and not for ourselves.

And that is our spiritual worship...

Or in the Greek it says our *logikos* worship.

Our word *logic* comes from that Greek word...

Presenting ourselves as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God is our sensible, logical, and appropriate response to God in view of his self-giving mercy.¹

The way we live our lives... is the gratitude we offer to God... in response to the grace that he has given to us in salvation.

And it starts... that gratitude starts...

by not being conformed to this world...

What is the world?

The structures of this world... this age... this society... this culture...

The systems of this world...

The politics of this world...

We are not to be conformed by any of these things...

As the Scottish minister William Barclay wrote:

We are not to be like a chameleon which takes its colour from its surroundings.²

We are not to be conformed to this world,

but we are to be transformed by the renewing of our minds...

Changed by the transforming grace of Jesus Christ.

¹ John Stott, *The Message of Romans* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 1994), 321.

² *Ibid.*, 323.

J.B. Phillip's paraphrased this verse, writing:

*Don't let the world around you squeeze you into its own mould,
but let God re-mould your minds from within...*

We are to be molded by the Holy Spirit.

We are to be shaped by the Holy Scriptures.

Renewed by the Spirit's illumination of the word of God.

And now that St. Paul has reminded us of our current state...

Our perspective of who we are... living sacrifices unto God...

He begins to write about how we are to behave in this world.

And he starts with how our posture is to be in the church.

And he suggests something that is very important for all of us.

He reminds us that church is not a popularity contest.

It's not a contest of which ministry is the most important.

It's not a contest of who gives the most...

or who looks the most well-dressed.

St. Paul writes:

[Do] 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.

So, because we are supposed to be dead-to-ourselves people living for God... being transformed by his Spirit...

we are to be figuring out what gifts and talents God has given us...

so that we can serve each other in that gifting.

In other words, we are to serve each other with our gifts...

If its prophecy... then bring guidance faithfully.

If its serving... then serve passionately.

If its giving... then give generously.

If its leading... then find a ministry to lead diligently.

If its giving compassion... then joyfully give comfort.

When everyone is focused on their role and how they can use it to help the church flourish... you know what happens?

Gossip subsides.

Animosity relinquishes.

Selfish ambition dissipates.

The church is a totally different place.

People are volunteering all over the place...

The church flourishes.

So, over these next few weeks...

As we talk about how the grace of our Lord Jesus is to be lived out in the church, in our neighborhoods, and so forth...

Remember... it's really not about you.

It's not about me.

It's about Jesus Christ.

Our lives are about our Lord and Savior...

We are called to magnify him...

And love people by pointing the way to Jesus.

So, let us go into the world this week...

Whether that is in-person or online...

And remember that we are living sacrifices to God ...

Sharing the good news of Jesus Christ

To a world that needs good news.

The way we live our lives says the most...

about what we truly believe about Jesus and his kingdom.

So, let the light of Christ shine brightly in your life.

Amen.