

## Living Sacrifice

I preach this morning in the name of God, the Father, the + Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Today is the twelfth Sunday after Pentecost, and we continue in the days in which we celebrate the outpouring of God's Holy Spirit in our lives. And as we celebrate the outpouring of God's Holy Spirit in our lives, we are transformed from the inside-out. For in the waters of Baptism, God claims your life as His own. In the waters of Baptism, Jesus gives you a new identity as a son or a daughter of the Most High God. And in the waters of Baptism, as Paul says in 2 Corinthians chapter 1, verse 22, the Holy Spirit is a "seal of ownership upon you, guaranteeing you what is to come."

Now, today, I want to talk to you about offering your life as a living sacrifice. Many of us have heard phrases before like, "God wants you to surrender all of your heart to Him." Or even "God wants you to yield your heart to Him, your mind to Him." Or even this, "God wants you to completely relinquish control to Him." Now all of these phrases are true, all of these phrases are right, and today we're going to unpack what these phrases mean by looking at the way in which the Holy Spirit invites you into a transformational relationship with God that daily experiences God's mercy and is constantly living empowered in God's grace.

So, I invite you to take out your Bibles and open up to Romans chapter 12, the first eight verses. And while you do that, I have a very important question to ask you. Yes, I did bring a tube of Colgate toothpaste with me to church this morning and I have a very serious question. How many of you are squeezers? How many of you are rollers? Put your hand up if you are a squeezer or you squeeze the tube - hands up, nice and high and proud. OK, how many of you are rollers? You roll the toothpaste out. OK, a few of you. Thank you, you put your hands down. I often find that rollers and squeezers marry together and it provides for a wonderful opportunity for marital counseling. If that describes your marriage, see me afterwards and I'll lay hands on you.

But I brought some toothpaste with me this morning because I want to show you that this is our message in a nutshell. I'm going to pour a little bit out here on this plate. Watch when I squeeze the tube of toothpaste and I put the toothpaste on this plate, notice the shape of my tube is changing. It's changing, but also notice it's changing from the outside in. Watch again: I'll squeeze and it's changing the shape of the tube from the outside in.

I also brought with me a balloon. Now this balloon, as you can obviously see, has no air in it. Right now it's void of shape - there is nothing about it. But once I blow air into it, it takes shape and it has form. But also notice: it takes shape and form, not from the outside in, but the inside out. I blew air into the balloon and it took its shape and form from the inside out.

Now, this is our lesson here today. This is the will of God for your life: God wants you to be a balloon. When you leave here today, you go on your way and someone asks you, "What was the message about today?" "God wants me to be a balloon!" Because He wants to transform you, not from the outside in, not from all of those experiences outside of your control that can sometimes bring us to a place of desperation. God wants to change us from the inside out. And to do that, to participate in that ongoing transformative process in which God leads us and guides us in this pilgrimage of faith in this life, it calls for a proper view of God's mercy.

Romans chapter 12, we pick it up in verse 1, "Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God - this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is - his good, pleasing and perfect will."

To live a life of sacrifice, to live a sacrificial life, is to be daily transformed by God's mercy. I was overwhelmed when I heard Bonita's story this morning because she was preaching by a life that has lived it - the very words that I'm trying to encapsulate in a 15 to 18 minute message. A life of sacrifice is a life that lives in daily the moments of life where you are desperate for God to show up, in that place where you call upon God in the desperation of your need. To live a sacrificial life is to be daily transformed, not once every year when you come to church on Christmas or Easter, but daily transformed. Daily renewed, as Paul says, "in the renewing of your mind," daily changed.

And if we're going to partner with the work of God the Holy Spirit in our life that was poured out upon us in the waters of Baptism, that requires for us to see with eyes of faith - to see what God is doing in our life and to partake of the journey with the Holy Spirit that guides us. It's to be transformed every day in God's mercy.

Notice here how Paul uses the word "therefore" in verse 1. He says, "Therefore, I urge you brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices." Now, "therefore" is a change word. "Therefore" is to recognize the God, who in chapters 1 through 11, called them in Jesus, the One who raised from the very depths of Sheol to the very heights of glory. This God who is calling them under the Roman authoritarian rule to not conform to the realities of the world or to be suppressed by the domination of Rome, but to rise above that - to live into the identity of Jesus Christ as the God who was crucified and the God who rose to new life again. He is calling them to live a life not transformed by the outside in, but rather transformed from the inside out.

Paul speaks of God's mercy and to give us a working definition this morning of what God's mercy is, we'll say this, "God, in His infinite love and steadfast goodness, is withholding from you what you do deserve." You deserve death; I deserve death; because of our sin, we deserve death. But what do we get? We don't get death. If we don't turn to Jesus and we don't turn to the God who in

Christ forgives us all of our sins, He wipes all of our sins clean and gives us a second chance - a new life, well then we will die in our sin, of course. But God's mercy withholds from you the very thing that you deserve.

King David in the scriptures knew very well what it looked like to experience God's mercy in his life. For he says in Psalm chapter 103, verses 8-10, "The Lord is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in love. He will not always accuse, nor will he harbor his anger forever." And here it is, listen carefully, "He does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our inequities." You see, because of God's grace, King David did not get what he deserved. Because of God's grace, that which he deserved was withheld from him and instead the love of God, the peace of God, the grace of God was given.

You see, God's mercy has the potential and the power to transform every part of our lives. How is God's mercy transforming you today? Do you realize what you really deserve? We live in this world of entitlement: "I've worked for...I've paid my rent...I've done this...I've done that...I have the accolades...I have the diplomas...I have all of these things to show forth of why..." But the Kingdom of God doesn't work that way.

The Kingdom of God withholds from you what you do deserve and He gives to you the very thing that you don't. He gives you a second chance; He gives you a new life. And the promise of God in His Word is that when you turn to Jesus everything that was coming your way - the darkness that you brought into your life, the disobedience of turning your back on the Lord, the way in which you caused your own pain - is forgiven. Those who have caused pain against you are forgiven. Those who have harmed you and hurt you are forgiven. And you can walk, not in the trajectory of darkness, you can walk in the new life of Jesus Christ. That's the promise of His word: that when you turn to Jesus, you shall live once again. That's the mercy of God.

It's like a balloon. Praying to the Lord Jesus, "Change me today, fill me from the inside out. Transform my life, Lord. Make me more like you." That's the prayer that Paul was leading these Christians in Rome to pray.

And this always leads to a life of humility toward others, Romans chapter 12, verse 3, "For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you." Now again, notice the change of his word from mercy to grace; that which was withheld from him and now he changes it to speak of God's grace.

He says in verse 3, "For by the grace given me I say to every one of you." Do you see what he is doing? He is letting the testimony of his life shine. He's letting the light of Jesus Christ that has transformed him and continues to transform him to shine before them. He has no right to speak into their lives apart from the fact that God has found a sinner. God has found someone who disobeyed and persecuted Christians, but now He sees somebody whose life has been changed. Now He sees a son whose life has been transformed.

So, we have a working definition of God's mercy and then we see humility, which follows. Humility always follows a life that's been changed, a life that considers others better than themselves; a life who sees in the gifts of others that which they do not have and empowers them into the ministry and to the call of God upon their life. It's humility when you see in others the goodness of God, the light of Jesus Christ, the hope of a better future. It's humility that bows a knee and says, "We are in this together. This is a team effort." It's the humility of God that says, "You are gifted, you are called, and I empower you in Jesus' name to do that which God has called you to do; to speak that which He has called you to speak." And to stand, as Bonita did before us this morning, and give thanks and praise to the God who is not dead, but the God who is still transforming lives.

God is in the business of transformation and we see in our church the transformative power of the Gospel. It's not to be contained here. You are sent in the power and the mercy and the grace and the anointing of God the Holy Spirit, to share Jesus' love in your workplace. As you go back to school, to share Jesus with your teachers and the administrators and those making difficult decisions. It's humility that always is the response of a heart that has been transformed.

And what is grace? God, in His infinite love and steadfast goodness, gifts to you what you *do not* deserve. He forgives you all of your sins.

There is one thing that has been and will remain life-saving in my relationship with my wife. And it's hearing her words spoken over me, "In the mercy of Almighty God, Jesus Christ forgives you all of your sin." That will hold a marriage together even when you have blown it like I have. Even when you allow your fears to take over, you have the authority. You have the keys of the kingdom to turn to your husband, to turn to your wife, to turn to that troubled heart that comes to you. When you hear the confession coming from their lips, you have the responsibility in Jesus' name by nature of your Baptism to say to them, "In the mercy of Almighty God." And remember what God's mercy is: it's God withholding from you what you do deserve. "In the mercy of Almighty God, Jesus Christ, He gives you His grace," He gives you by His infinite love, His steadfast goodness; He gives you what you do not deserve.

And when I hear my wife say those words over me, when I hear a pastor pronounce absolution over me, I'm a new creation. And the joy of the Lord comes out of my heart because that is the call of worship. Paul says, "Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God - this is your spiritual act of worship." There is nothing more powerful than to be forgiven. There is nothing more transformative than to receive God's grace.

Being transformed by God's mercy is receiving God's grace; and receiving God's grace activates the gifts that God has given to you for the building up of His church. Verse 6, "We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. If a man's gift is prophesying, then let him use it in proportion to his faith; if it is serving, let him serve; if it is teaching, let him teach; if it is encouraging, let him encourage; if it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously; if it is leadership, let him govern diligently; and if it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully."

You see, the reason why God has gifted you in the way in which He has is not for yourself, but for the building up of the church of Jesus Christ. To be a blessing as you so richly are blessed, not *have been* blessed, but *are* blessed. Because God's grace is a daily transformative experience where what you deserve, you don't get. And living in God's grace is constantly empowering you to share the gifts that God has given to you with all people that He brings into your life.

Today, God is calling you to be a balloon. You'll never see a balloon the same again, I'm sure - to be changed from the inside out. Will you allow the Holy Spirit today to change your life?

Amen