

Pentecost +14  
Rev. Doug Floyd  
Romans 12:1-8

Jesus calls us to take up our cross and follow Him. What does that look like? Every Easter, we hear stories of some people who take this literally and are crucified. In college, I thought I was called to be a martyr, but I was called to die daily.

Our second lesson offers some clarification on that question. We begin with Romans 12:1-2. This is one of the most quoted passages in Romans. “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. 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>1</sup>

Paul begins with an appeal to the mercies of God. Up to this point in the letter, the focus has been on the mercies of God. We have been rescued from enslavement to sin and death by the mercies of God. We have been filled with the Spirit by the mercies of God. We are loved beyond measure by the mercies of God. Our faith is rooted in God’s mercy and grace from first to last.

As a people who have known and continue to know the mercies of God, Paul calls us to present our bodies as a living sacrifice to God. There are no more blood sacrifices. No more animals are offered to God as worship. We offer our bodies as worship. What does this mean? Paul is going to offer examples of this spiritual worship throughout the rest of the letter. First, he explains our mind must be renewed, so that we can discern the will of God.

So Romans 12 opens with two issues worship as a living sacrifice that involves our bodies and a renewed mind that can properly discern the will of God. This is a reversal of Romans 1:18-32. At the beginning of the letter to the Romans, Paul explains that humans have turned from worship of the Creator to worship created things. As a result, they dishonored their own bodies and engaged in all sorts of impure actions. Secondly, their mind became debased and embraced all sorts of perversion.

Now the mercy of God has rescued us from the way of death. Our bodies have been restored for proper worship and our minds are being renewed for proper thoughts. These two go hand in hand: the body and the mind. The body and mind offered to God overshadow the rest of the letter. Paul explores what it means use our bodies and our minds in response to the mercies of God.

- Right thinking and acting about myself
- Right thinking and acting about my fellow Christians
- Right thinking and acting about people who treat me wrong
- Right thinking and acting about government
- Right thinking and acting about holy living

---

<sup>1</sup> *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ro 12:1–2.

- Right thinking and acting about worship

The mercies of God have so overwhelmed us with God's goodness that we are changed and are changing. In every circumstance, we are a living sacrifice of praise unto God. Our thinking is changed and being changed from the patterns of the world to the patterns of the kingdom. Or as NT Wright says, we "think as age-to-come people rather than present-age people." The kingdom of God is breaking in all around. God's kingdom is rooted in selfless love: just as Jesus modelled in the cross.

We are learning how to pour out our lives in love in all circumstances. The age of selfishness is coming to an end. We begin with ourselves in relation to the body of Christ. Once I taste of the mercies of God, I can rest in God's faithful love toward me. I don't have to earn that love, perform for that love, compete for the love. I rest in God's love.

As I rest in God's love, I don't have to worry about proving something to the people around me. I don't need to think of myself more highly than I ought, but I am free to think about those around me. My gifts are not to affirm my ego, but to serve those around me in love. Paul says that "we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another."<sup>2</sup>

Our lives are bound together in Christ. When one member is suffering, we carry that suffering. When one member experiences a blessing in job or home, we all rejoice. Interceding for one another is an overflow of the divine love that moves within us and between us.

Within any community of faith, there are a variety of gifts. Paul says, "Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith; if service, in our serving; the one who teaches, in his teaching; the one who exhorts, in his exhortation; the one who contributes, in generosity; the one who leads, with zeal; the one who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness."<sup>3</sup>

This is partly where this discerning of God's will comes in. We ask, "Lord how can I serve those around me?" Sometimes it may mean offering a listening ear. Other times it may mean physically stack chairs. And still other times it may mean giving to meet a need. Our whole person is offered to one another in service even as it is a living sacrifice to God. Worship involves singing and praying in the service, but it also includes physically serving, financially contributing, exhorting one another, leading in some situations and showing mercy.

Paul has started a list for us, but this kind of outpoured life can take shape in all sorts of ways and at all sorts of times. Sometimes it will mean that our life as a living sacrifice is inconvenient. That's okay. We may need more inconveniences. Sometimes the outpouring of love is extravagant. What a joy!

I encourage you to take time to think of your life as a living sacrifice in light of the rest of Romans. Our mind and body is being renewed and taking shape in and through the wonder of God's faithful mercy and love.

---

<sup>2</sup> *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ro 12:5.

<sup>3</sup> *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ro 12:6–8.