

## Living Sacrifices

Romans 12:1-8

Pentecost 15

What is the biggest promise you ever made? For those of you who are confirmed in the faith, who have technically gone through the rite of confirmation, do you remember what you promised on your confirmation day? Maybe it was as an adult during one of our services after taking our Bible Information Class. Maybe it was a youth after our youth catechism class. One of the things you promised was to suffer all things, even death, before renouncing the faith. That's a big promise. We certainly need God's help to keep it. We need God's forgiveness when we fail at it and we have that forgiveness in Christ.

There are people who throughout history and today throughout the world who have died for their faith. And, it is something we should be ready to do. Jesus, in our Gospel for today, tells us whoever loses his life for him will find it.

But, as Christians, in addition to being called to die for our faith, we are also called to live, to live a certain way. Paul says in our second lesson, **"Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship."** In view of God's mercy, we are called to offer our bodies as living sacrifices to God.

A couple of key concepts here... First, mercy. Mercy is treating someone not the way they deserve to be treated. We deserve to die for our sin. We deserve punishment. We deserve God's wrath. But he treats us differently. Because of the work of his Son, Jesus, instead of giving us punishment, he gives us eternal life in heaven. Mercy. When we say, "Lord, have mercy on us," we are saying, "Lord, don't treat us according to what we deserve."

Another important concept in this part of our second lesson are sacrifices and living sacrifices. In the Old Testament, God required the sacrifice of animals according to specific guidelines. Their death symbolized the future death of the Christ and the blood of those animals pointed to the blood of Christ that would cover over all sin. The worship life of the Old Testament centered on these sacrifices. It was a big part of the way they worshipped.

But now, we don't look forward to the death of Christ, we look back at his death and his resurrection, his rising to life. So, it's fitting that now our worship life doesn't include sacrifices in the traditional sense of the death, but rather our worship includes offering up our bodies as living sacrifices – making the right choices in the way we live and even in the way we treat and take care of our bodies and letting that be an act of worship, a way that we thank and praise God.

Early this week our nation remembered and recognized the anniversary of the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks. That day was an absolutely terrible day in our nation's history and in world history. There was massive loss of life and a great level of fear was established and to a certain some of that fear carries over to today.

Times of tragedy can bring out the worst of people. But they can also bring out the best. That's true of terrorist attacks of September 11 and the hardship of this current era of the coronavirus. Challenging situations, even horrific situations, can bring out the best of people.

There is an interesting story, a true story, connected to the September 11 terrorist attacks that shows how a local community worked together in a beautiful way. Maybe you've heard this story. On September 11

all of the planes in or entering United States airspace had to make emergency landings at their closest available airport. Delta Flight 15, headed from Germany to the United States, along with 36 other planes, carrying a total of 6,700 people all made their emergency landings in the little town of Lewisporte, Canada at Gander International Airport. What happened when they landed was beautiful.

Everything came to a stop in small town. The community of about 10,000 people mobilized to help what they called the “plane people.” Many of the “plane people” had to wait as long as 24 hours before they could get off the plane because of the customs process and security measures. While the people sat on their planes, the people of Lewisporte organized a system to bring them food. Lewisporte only had about 500 hotel rooms so when the people could get off the planes, the people of Lewisporte had set up lodging at local schools for them. Pregnant women got to stay at a hotel across from the clinic and all elderly people were taken to homes to stay. Bus drivers came off strike to provide transportation. Residents opened up their homes so that the “plane people” could shower. The town organized ways to get clothing, food, and medicine for the “plane people” for the 3 days that they were grounded in Lewisporte.

When Delta Flight 15 left Lewisporte and was in the air a man onboard asked to make an announcement. He stated that he would be setting up a trust fund that would provide scholarships for the young people in Lewisporte and asked for donations, saying he would match whatever was pledged on the flight. On that flight, before it landed back in the states, \$15,000 was pledged and so with the matching a total of \$30,000. A good amount of money. But, after news of the Lewisporte hospitality, the fund received over \$1.5M. The “plane people” and others in view of the mercy that the town of Lewisporte had on them, offered something in return.

The mercy that the people of Lewisporte had for the “plane people”... the “plane people” didn’t do anything to deserved their hospitality... that mercy was beautiful. However, the mercy that God has had on you and me is even more beautiful and way more impactful. In God’s mercy, he sent his Son to live, die, and rise again to be our Savior.

The people of Lewisporte opened their homes and set up shelters for the “plane people.” God’s Son, Jesus, opened up heaven for you. Jesus promises you that in heaven he has a mansion prepared for you. It’s reported that the people of Lewisporte baked fresh bread for the “plane people.” God, your heavenly Father, provides you with your daily bread. He gives you everything you need for your time in this life. Even more, he gives you Jesus, the Bread of Life. The people of Lewisporte provided the “plane people,” in the midst of a terrible tragedy, some relief and comfort. God, the Holy Spirit, who the bible describes as the Comforter, provides you with relief and comfort for your soul through God’s Word and Sacraments.

In view of that, in view of God’s mercy, we are told to offer our bodies as living sacrifices.

There are a lot of different ways we can do this. We could talk about sexual immorality and indulging in certain things or abusing certain things that are harmful to our bodies. There are things that we must avoid and from which we must refrain. We could talk about ways to take care of our bodies. After all, they are a temple of the Holy Spirit. We could talk about eating right, exercising, getting sleep, and how these are ways to offer our bodies as living sacrifices. We could talk about the different strengths and abilities that we have and using them for service in the kingdom. Paul, in the second half of our second lesson, encourages us to know our gifts and use them accordingly.

There are a lot of ways and many things we should do and things we should not do to offer our bodies as living sacrifices. As you think about your life and consider them, let's focus on the starting point. Paul gives us a place to begin. He writes, **"Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind."** We are told that in order to offer our bodies as a living sacrifice, we are not to conform to the pattern of the world; we are told that we are not to conform to the world by being transformed by the renewing of our minds.

So, offering our bodies as living sacrifices all starts with our minds, with our thoughts, thinking about **"whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable, things that are excellent or praiseworthy (Philippians 4:8)."** Thinking about those things, think about God's mercy, not the patterns of the world, and that will renew our minds, which will transform our life, and lead us to be living sacrifice.

Picture your life like a ride on Delta Flight 15 that left Lewisporte and was returning home. Only, picture it as if you are plane ride through this life to heaven. You boarded the plane the moment that God in his mercy put faith in your heart. Before you even got on this plane, God had mercy on you by sending his Son to be your Savior. Now, while on the ride, on your way to heaven and in the view of God's mercy, what can you offer to God in gratitude? We know where to start, with our thoughts, our minds.

We should be willing to die for our faith. But we should also be willing to live, eager to live, excited to live, to make our lives living sacrifices. That is true and proper worship. Amen.