

**Fifteenth Sunday after Pentecost September 21, 2014**  
**Good Shepherd Ev. Lutheran Church**

*Pastor Charles Heup*

**Romans 12:1-8 (ESV)**

**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.** 2) 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. 3) 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. **4) For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, 5) so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another.** 6) Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith; 7) if service, in our serving; the one who teaches, in his teaching; 8) 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.

Dear members of the body of Christ:

It's free! Sometimes those words can make a big difference for people. I remember a number of years I was helping to serve free lemon aid at Mill Street festival. A rather tired looking mom walked down the street with her young family. As she passed by our booth, one of her children pleaded, "Mom, can we have some lemon aid?" No, doubt it wasn't the first time one of the children had asked her for something. Her body language said more than her words as she just kept walking until one of the children said, "But mom, it's free!" She stopped in her tracks, looked at our sign for herself, smiled and walked over to our booth. The smile on her face said it all!

It would have been different if she would have had to buy the lemonade. It just wasn't in the budget. Free – that one word made a world of difference to this mother and her family. Under those circumstances she was willing and able to allow her family to enjoy a glass of lemonade.

I'm sure we've all experienced similar situations in our lives. We've made up our minds about something and then all of a sudden we get some new information which causes us to pause and rethink the situation. In light of the new information we change our minds and our course of action.

That's the kind of attitude which our text for today encourages. In the verses prior to our text Paul reminds us that our salvation and the fact that we are Christians is due entirely to God's mercy. It's a free gift to us won by Christ Jesus. This mercy has an eternal impact on our lives. It causes us to take a new look at our lives and to live them with a different attitude. Now we live...

Theme: **In view of God's mercy**

- 1. We live our lives as sacrifices**
- 2. We live in our church as one**

**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.** Stop and think about God's mercy. In his mercy God sent his one and only Son to be your Savior. That Son sacrificed his life for you. Think of that. It brings a smile to our faces and joy to our hearts doesn't it? God's mercy changes the situation for us

doesn't it? We are no longer stuck trying to figure out a way to feel good about ourselves in spite of our sins. We can stop hoping that we've done enough, stop comparing ourselves to others and we can stop trying to do good works in an effort to make God happy with us.

By the mercies of God – our sins are forgiven. Therefore we don't have to feel guilty any longer. And our motivation for doing good works also changes doesn't it. Our attitude toward the acts of service we perform as members of the Lord's church also takes on a new look.

The mercy of God, the sacrifice which he made for us calls for a response. It brings a smile to our face as we gladly plan our own sacrifices of thanksgiving. What is the proper thanks for someone who gave his life for us? Can we be content with bringing some bread and meat like the Old Testament believers did with their grain and animal sacrifices? Can we be content with bringing a few denarii – a few coins for Gospel outreach as the Old Testament believers did when they paid the temple taxes?

In the Old Testament times God required his people to bring him a variety of animal sacrifices in a variety of settings and situations. Those animals were ceremoniously killed and formally presented to the Lord. Thus they symbolically became the Lord's property. Paul asks the Romans and us, as NT Christians to bring ourselves as living sacrifices. There are some striking differences between Old and New Testament sacrifices. In the Old something was brought as a substitute. In the New the Christian brings himself, not as a dead sacrifice but as a living sacrifice which is able to respond to God's mercy with service that is holy and acceptable to him. It's a service which flows from the heart and isn't just outward ceremony. It's no wonder that Paul tells us to offer ourselves to the Lord. After all we truly belong to him. The Scriptures remind us that we have been bought with a price – God bought us with his own blood. (1 Cor. 6:20; 7:23; Acts 20:28)

We are holy and acceptable to him because we have been washed by the blood of Christ. Christ gave his life for us – now in response we offer our life to him as our spiritual worship. **We love the Lord with all our heart, with all our mind and with all our soul.** Paul makes it clear that as the Lord's own precious possession we can not be content to think of worship as a "spectator sport" where we sit in a pew in a church building for an hour a week watching someone else performing. Christian worship involves action. True worship is an attitude which goes with us as we continually respond to God's mercies -- giving God thanks and praise for his mercy.

In view of God's mercy to us we live our lives as a sacrifice to the Lord. Paul explains what this means in our text when he states some general principals to follow. **2) 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.**

It is dangerously easy for believers living a world which is soft on sin to share the world's attitude toward sin. Immorality, greed, materialism and other forms of lovelessness are commonly accepted as ways of life in our world. Don't conform to these attitudes Paul says. The world rebels against God and his Word. God's mercy changes things for us. It leads us to rebel against the sinful ways of the world and to become non-conformists as we live in keeping with the will of God. This change doesn't come from within us. God's Word will transform or change our minds about sin. This is a beautiful transformation. Just as a beautiful Monarch butterfly springs forth from a rather drab, fuzzy, earthbound caterpillar, so Christians soar forth from the ashes of death and sin.

We can live our lives with the confidence that God will be faithful to all of his promises thereby testing and proving over and over again that God means what he says and does what he promises. In view of God's mercy we are confident that everything will work out for our good. We can rely on God for everything. There

is nothing which is too much for God to accomplish in our lives. We can put all of his promises to the test. (2 Corinthians 1:20) **For no matter how many promises God has made, they are "Yes" in Christ. And so through him the "Amen" is spoken by us to the glory of God.**

As a part of God's mercy – we have been joined together into the body of Christ. Therefore in view of God's mercy we will not just offer our bodies as sacrifices we will also live in the church as one. Our text helps us to understand some of the practical aspects of Christian unity as we use the Word of God to test and discern what his will is for our lives.

**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.**

Our unity comes from Christ who gave his life for us all. Therefore we are reminded to set aside the ways of the world which promote self and to humble our selves – recognizing the role in the church that God has given to us so that we gladly accept it and willingly use the talents we have been given to glorify the Lord as we function as a body. Our faith allows us to set aside our sinful pride and to think of ourselves as part of the body of Christ. Martin Luther made this comment in connection with this verse: *“Paul is saying all of these things for the sake of unity, because nothing causes so many dissensions as when one does not work within the limits of his calling, but leaves his own work undone, while he seizes on that of someone else, or if he does not seize on the work of another, he still neglects his own. From this come contentions.”* Luther reminds us to let others do the work that they have been equipped by the Lord to do. He also reminds us not to neglect the work that we have been equipped to do.

In order to help us to look at ourselves and our abilities with the eyes of faith rather than the eyes of this world Paul draws a picture with words for us.

**4) For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, 5) so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another.** For a more complete picture or description of what Paul says here it would be good to take a look at 1 Corinthians 12. (You can do that in your personal use of God's Word this week.) There Paul goes into detail explaining how each part of our body is a gift from God and serves a particular function. So it is in the church. There are many different individuals. There are many different types of offices or types of service or ministries in the Lord's church – all are important – all have been given for the benefit of the Lord's church. In this section of Romans Paul cites a few examples.

**6) We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. If a man's gift is prophesying** (publicly proclaiming the word) , **let him use it in proportion to his faith** (in agreement with the Gospel). **7) If it is serving, let him serve; if it is teaching, let him teach; 8) 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; if it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully.**

**6) Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophecy** (publically proclaiming the word), **[do it] in proportion to our faith;** (in agreement with the Gospel) **7) if service, in our serving; the one who teaches, in his teaching; 8) 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.**

These are gifts which can be found in a typical Christian congregation. They are the “bread and butter” of any congregation that intends to function and prosper in the doing the Lord's work.

Paul listed seven gifts: prophesying, serving, teaching, encouraging, contributing, exercising leadership, and showing mercy. He could have made his point with a shorter list or he could have expanded that list. The point he's making is this: Don't think too highly of yourself; on the other hand don't neglect the gifts God has given you. Rather employing sound judgment, faithfully use the various gifts God has given you for the common good. Each of us has some gift and each gift is necessary -- just as our bodies have different parts which serve vital and important functions.

Within Christ's church there are all kinds of people – people who have different points of view, different interests, different backgrounds, different talents, abilities, and gifts. Some have many gifts and abilities. Others don't have as many. But we all have some. These differences ought to be a source of joy not a source of strife. We have been brought together in the Lord's kingdom and wonder of wonders he has made us to complement one another. Working together, we can accomplish many things by God's grace and power. Left alone we couldn't possibly do as much, because none of us has all of the individual gifts the Lord has given to the members of his church. It's important for all the members of Christ's church to use their gifts and abilities if that church is going to be able to accomplish the mission the Lord has given to it. This is a natural part of living our individual lives as sacrifices to the Lord.

Since we are all connected to Christ and since we need each other we should treat each other as we treat the various parts of our own bodies. We are reminded in Ephesians 5:29 that **no one ever hated his own body, but he feeds and cares for it, just as Christ does the church** therefore we will want to look after each other in love as we take care of one another, admonish, encourage each other as we work together with our varied talents. That's part of living in our church as one.

The unity that Paul speaks of doesn't come naturally – it comes in view of God's mercy to us. Just as offering ourselves to the Lord's service is a response to his mercy.

There are lots of opportunities and activities here at Good Shepherd for us to offer ourselves as living sacrifices and to work together as members of the Lord's church. As we look ahead to the weeks and months to come we realize that those opportunities will continue to present themselves. In view of God's mercy would we really want it any other way?

When we consider where we would be with out that mercy – it's easy to see why in view of God's mercy we live our lives as sacrifices and why we live as one in our church.

May the Lord enable us to grow in his grace as we continue in view of his mercy to **live our lives as sacrifices and to live as one in his church.** Amen.