

Serving as a Living Sacrifice

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Damascus United Methodist Church

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

Tenth Sunday After Pentecost – August 21, 2011

In 2006, when I took my one and only computer course, I had just one burning question, “What does the XP in WINDOWS XP stand for?” So, I asked my husband, Wes, who is a career computer person. To which he replied, “I don’t know.” Next, I really asked, “How can you use something and not understand what it stands for?” You can imagine the ‘you’ve got to be kidding’ face he made in reply. As Wes assured me, “Really, Linda, it’s no problem at all.”

I’m just like that. When I don’t know or understand what something means, I really want to learn & find out. When I do, then it means more to me,...well... usually .. it does. So who knew? I found out the XP in Windows XP stands for Experience. Now, I smile every time I use it, reveling in knowing just that. (Different strokes for different folks!)

Maybe today’s sermon title was like that for you. What does *servicing as a living sacrifice* mean? Well, stay with me for about the next 12 minutes, and I promise you will revel in knowing!

Paul, the apostle, had heard of the church at Rome. But, neither Paul nor any of the other Jerusalem church leaders had visited there. Because ‘visiting Jews from Rome’ were present in Jerusalem at Pentecost, they became believers in Christ. As these new Jewish Christians returned to their home in Rome, they helped spread the faith. As a result, the Roman church began with mostly Jewish Christians and a good number of Gentile Christians. Paul wrote to the Romans around 57 C.E. from Corinth. Since the Gospels were not yet being shared in their written form, Paul’s written word of encouragement and statement of faith in Romans was possibly their only written Christian text. In the book of Romans, Paul told them that after delivering an offering for the poor in Jerusalem, he would come visit the Roman believers.

In a big picture sense, Paul’s book of Romans can be divided into 2 major parts. The first three-fourths (11 chapters) of Romans is about theology –what Christians are to believe about God. The last one fourth (5 chapters) are about how Christians are to live. Like an attorney, Paul makes his case for the gospel in

Romans. Today's text comes from the beginning of the last one-fourth portion of Romans where Paul shares how Christians are to live.

Paul recognizes all Christians are exceedingly thankful for what God has mercifully done for them in Jesus Christ. As a result, Christians worship and praise God – what Paul calls our spiritual worship. In Romans, Paul knows he is writing to many Jewish Christians. During Paul's time, animal sacrifice was still common among Jews -- as well as in other religions. So, Paul uses sacrificial language to call upon believers to present their bodies, their whole selves, to God. (Remember, Paul was a master in connecting with the context of his audience.) Paul suggests that God desires 'living sacrifice.' This means that rather than bring an animal sacrifice to offer to God in thanksgiving, *redirect your thinking*. Instead, consider that 'all you are and how you live'- it represents a 'living sacrifice' to God.

Each day for Christians, this means, "Don't let the world around you squeeze you into its own mold." This is J.B. Phillips' translation of giving God the priority instead of society in how Christians live.' Doing so transforms a Christian's life as it is led by God's will. As a result, a Christian matures and reflects the image of Christ in what is done, said and thought. *However*, in Romans 12:3, Paul warns believers not to think too highly of themselves. If we remember where our value as a Christian comes from-- in Jesus Christ-- then we can humbly and worthily serve God and others from that foundation.

Paul uses the example of a human body as a powerful image to explain how Christians can live and work together. Our human bodies are designed with diverse parts, and each specific part works differently. Yet, they all work together, for the same function and common goal. So it is also with a diverse body of believers in Christ. Each Christian, like human body parts, is made differently with a specific function. When all the different parts come together, they work in unity so the entire body functions as a whole. Without each of the parts, the body would miss a function in its design. For example, the brain cannot work without the help of the heart or the foot cannot walk without the help of the hip. One body part is not better than the other. Instead, each is different and important for the whole body to function.

Similarly, the Body of Christ is created. God has gifted each believer, through the Holy Spirit, spiritual gifts specific to each person. Every believer possesses at least one spiritual gift. Each Christian contributes an important significance to the Body of Christ. One Christian is not more important than the

other; rather, each Christian is different so the whole body can function.

When a Christian serves according to his/her God-given spiritual gift, the Body of Christ is strengthened, others are served, and God is glorified. The sense of enjoyment, meaning, and purpose in doing so is easily recognized. Who can think of Billy Graham and not acknowledge his spiritual gift of evangelism/teaching? Who can think of Mother Theresa and not know of her spiritual gift of healing/compassion?

God expects us to use our spiritual gifts to serve others and glorify God. A wonderful addition to using our God-given spiritual gifts is our humble sense of worth and joy that increases exponentially. We realize we do not feel forced, but rather we feel like 'bees to honey' in what we do. When serving out of our spiritual gifts, Christians cannot get enough of living for Christ!

An illustration shows how different spiritual gifts might come into play in real life. Imagine that you were invited to a Wonderful Wednesday dinner here at DUMC in the Dining Hall with several other people. You've all had a wonderful dinner, and you are just settling back for dessert. One person in your party uses her gift of hospitality by bringing out a tray with all of the desserts on it. However, she trips, drops the tray, breaks the dishes and spreads dessert all over the floor. The response of everybody would be determined by their spiritual gift. The person with the gift of serving would jump up and say, "Let me help you clean that up." The one with the gift of teaching would say, "Now the reason that fell was because it was too heavy on one side, and it was off balance. We need to learn a lesson from this experience." The person with the gift of prophecy...well, that was the one who had just announced, "Don't bring all those over here at once because the tray is too heavy."

The person with the gift of encouragement would say, "Hey that's okay, we didn't need dessert anyway." The person with the gift of giving says, "Don't worry, I'll run over to Safeway and buy a cake that can serve all of us. The one with the gift of leadership will say, "Fred, go get a mop. Mary, could you a damp cloth from the kitchen? Tom and I will make sure that all the glass is picked up." Meanwhile, the person with the gift of mercy would have an arm around the person with the tray saying, "Don't feel bad. That could have happened to anyone."

As God would have it, a Spiritual Gifts Class called "Many Gifts One Spirit" was recently experienced at DUMC. Six people identified their spiritual gifts. In addition, they named their personal style (meaning how they are energized and

organized) and claimed their ministry passion (which is a God-given heartfelt desire to make a difference in this world). Time availability and spiritual maturity were considered. The end goal connected each person's spiritual gifts, personal style and ministry passion with DUMC's ministries. Lots of laughter, enjoyment and light bulbs of spiritual insight occurred. We laughed so much that another group meeting in the same building wondered what we were studying. That's a fitting endorsement for serving out of our spiritual gifts, wouldn't you say? This Spiritual Gifts class will be offered again soon. Let me know if you are interested so you might do the same. As a Christian serving in the Body of Christ, at the class' end each participant felt stronger in his/her calling to serve others using their spiritual gifts to the glory of God.

Today, as we celebrate Communion as the Body of Christ, we will hear the familiar phrase: "we offer ourselves as a living sacrifice." Let us genuinely commit to this concept today. Let us accept the bread and the wine, as the body and blood of Jesus Christ given for each of us. This day, let us renew our minds in what it means to be a living sacrifice. Let us allow God to transform our lives so that what we do, think and say transforms us into reflecting the image of Christ. May we always serve as a living sacrifice. Amen.