

## Sermon followed by Service

March 12, 2023 Romans 12:1-8

It's just about time. Less than a month to Easter. Less than a month to Easter eats, and no one is signed up to bring sainted eggs and sausage bites. Pastor makes his plea: "In view of God's mercy, can you help?" So Mrs. Hen says to Mrs. Porker: "In view of God's mercy, let's do this. Let's offer ourselves to take care of Easter breakfast." So Mrs. Porker thinks - pigs are very smart, you know - and she pictures bowls of hard-boiled eggs and the special-shaped plates of sainted eggs, but she smells the heavenly grease of sausage bites. And Mrs. Porker says to Mrs. Hen: "Offer ourselves? That's easy for you to say. Offering yourself means giving up a few eggs, and then you get to stand by and watch. Offering myself means going to the butcher and sausage grinder. You'll just be involved; I'll be committed."

When Paul by the Holy Spirit calls on us "to offer ourselves" is he calling on us to be involved like the chicken or committed like the pig? When I hear Paul: "**Offer your bodies as sacrifices**" ... When I hear Moses: "**Love the Lord your God**

**with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength”** ... When I hear Jesus: **“Deny yourselves ... pick up your cross and follow me”** – God isn’t just calling us to be involved, to give a little and then stand by and watch. He isn’t just calling us to give up some thing, but we can still be ourselves. No, God is calling us to sacrifice ourselves, to quit being ourselves, to quit living for ourselves; God is calling us to give ourselves 100% to him because we belong 100% to him.

To live with God - not just sometimes or even most times, but to live 100% with God - that’s why God created us. To live with God - as the holy ones of God - that’s why God saved us. To live with God - as the body of Christ - doing God’s good, putting evil in its place, showing and sharing the glory and love of God - that’s God’s purpose for us.

And if we have any argument with that he says: **“Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought.”** And if we still argue with that ... if we think we can live our own lives giving God a little off the edge now and then ... if we think we can live in the middle between commitment to self and commitment to God ... even if we think it’s alright to run 90-95 % committed to Christ ... check out what Jesus says to his churches in

Revelation. He's ready to spit out the lukewarm swimming in the middle and he's ready to pull his blessing out from those who think it's OK to run less than 100% for God.

Hearing that we might hear some arguing voices inside us. They might sound sensible, reasonable. But they're arguing against the Jesus who says: "Deny yourselves"; they're echoing Satan who says: "Be true to yourself; do what you want." They're voices that need to silence before they take us over and God silences us. Hearing what God says about commitment: "Love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength," instead of making excuses, we need to turn to God: "Father, forgive us."

And then, God, instead of giving us excuses, shows us his commitment - Christ and the cross. Christ didn't settle for an easier kind of commitment (a little off the edge); but he prayed, he lived, and he died - "**not my will, but your will be done.**" And God - seeing Christ's cross, seeing Christ's commitment to him - God is willing to see you and me and the world as committed to him. In Christ's cross and sacrifice for sin, God is willing to see the world's sin paid for and gone. In Christ's cross and commitment God sees you forgiven and right,

committed and commissioned - co-missioned with God - to work God's great work in this world, committed and commissioned to live and rule with Christ in heaven.

Does that mean that God wants us to make the pig's commitment to butcher knife and sausage grinder? For some of us the answer to that question might be "yes." Look at the apostles' shields - knife - sword - spear - cross. But that's not God's call to us in our lesson. Here God calls us to "**offer our bodies as living sacrifices.**" To be a living sacrifice means taking care of ourselves, not just emptying ourselves for God, but filling ourselves, or better, letting God fill us. In the Old Testament God scheduled it for his people - every week a day off and a day in - a day off from work for body and mind to rest and recuperate - a day in Worship and Word getting God's rest and recuperation for heart and soul. In the New Testament God doesn't schedule it for us; we get to schedule it for us.

Let's make sure we do that and let's insist on it from our leaders and teachers and our whole body! As pastor and teachers, as Bible Class leaders and Sunday School teachers, as church leaders and school leaders - as dads, moms, grandparents and Godparents, as brothers and sisters - have I

left anyone out? - let's show that offering ourselves as living sacrifices isn't just a matter of giving and doing, but to be a living sacrifice means filling up on the life-giving word of Jesus. Otherwise our leading and teaching will become less and less about Christ, shallower and shallower, and our giving and doing will be less about Christ and more and more about ourselves. To be living sacrifices holy and pleasing to God we must be filled and refilled with the life and the heart of Christ.

Then we will see that the best place on the farm to find the committed Christian isn't in the chicken or the pig, but in the vine and the branches. As living sacrifices we don't just give up some thing we have, but we give ourselves to God. And we don't just give ourselves as a one-time gift to God; day after day we give ourselves to be part of the living body of Christ with Jesus himself living and working in us and through us. We do that in bringing Jesus to our families; we do that in bringing Jesus to our world where we work, and live, and play. And - Paul wants us to know - we do that by living and working in the body of Christ, living and working in Christ's church.

I know that's not always easy. I know there are times one

part of the body offers to help and another part of the body forgets. Times one part of the body tries to help, and another part of the body gets in the way. I know there are times parts of the body feel unappreciated. And other parts feel that they don't have anything to offer. And other parts think they don't have the time. And on and on. We can all think of our hurts and excuses and reasons not to offer ourselves to work in the body of Christ. And we can let those hurts and excuses and reasons keep us from offering ourselves.

But we don't have to live stuck in view of those hurts and excuses and "reasons." That's not the view God has for us. Instead, we get to live in view of God's mercy and promise. We aren't just chickens to sit on the sidelines, and we're not pigs to be run through the grinder. We are branches connected to the vine; we are part of the body of Christ with Christ living in us. If you don't know what you can do ... if you would like to be doing something more, something different, let's talk. And as living sacrifices let's offer ourselves to the work God has for us - it's the God-Lived Life. Amen.

March 11 & 12, 2023

## SERVICE OF THE WORD

IN OUR WORSHIP TODAY ... our Lord shows us the God-Lived Life isn't just a matter of doing some things that look good on the outside. The God-Lived Life is moved by the love of God to sacrifice self for the sake of serving God and his world, applying our talents (all he has given us) to his mission and ministry to the world.

### OPENING HYMN

*"God, Whose Giving Knows No Ending"*

Hymn 749

God, whose giving knows no ending, from your rich and endless store:  
nature's wonder, Jesus' wisdom, costly cross, grave's shattered door —  
gifted by you, we turn to you, off'ring up ourselves in praise;  
thankful songs shall rise forever, gracious donor of our days.

Skills and time are ours for pressing toward the goals of Christ, your Son:  
all at peace in health and freedom, races joined, the church made one.  
Now direct our daily labor, lest we strive for self alone;  
born with talents, make us servants fit to answer at your throne.

Treasure, too, you have entrusted,  
gain through pow'rs your grace conferred:  
ours to use for home and kindred, and to spread the gospel word.  
Open wide our hands in sharing, as we heed Christ's ageless call,  
healing, teaching, and reclaiming, serving you by loving all.

### INVOCATION

M: The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you.

C: **And also with you.**

+ CONFESSION OF SINS AND ABSOLUTION +

M: We have come into the presence of God, who created us to love and serve him as his dear children. But we have disobeyed him and deserve only his wrath and punishment. Therefore, let us confess our sins to him and plead for his mercy.

C: **Merciful Father in heaven, I am altogether sinful from birth. In countless ways I have sinned against you and do not deserve to be called your child. But trusting in Jesus, my Savior, I pray: Have mercy on me according to your unfailing love. Cleanse me from my sin, and take away my guilt.**

M: God, our heavenly Father, has forgiven all your sins. By the perfect life and innocent death of our Lord Jesus Christ, he has removed your guilt forever. You are his own dear child. May God give you strength to live according to his will. **Amen.**

+ PRAYER AND PRAISE +

M: In the peace of forgiveness, let us praise the Lord.

HYMN

*"O Taste and See"*

Hymn 965

O taste and see that the Lord is good. Bless-ed are they who take  
ref - uge in him. Your Word, O Lord, is e - ter - nal; it  
stands firm in the heav - ens. Your faith - ful - ness con -  
tin - ues for - ev - er. O taste and see that the





Lord is good. Bless - ed are they who take ref - uge in him.

### PRAYER OF THE DAY

Lord God Almighty, so rule and govern our hearts and minds by your Holy Spirit that we may always look forward to the end of this present evil age and the day of your righteous judgment. Keep us steadfast in true and living faith, and present us at last holy and blameless before you; through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

**Amen.**

### FIRST READING

*Isaiah 1:10–18*

Hear the word of the LORD,  
you rulers of Sodom;  
listen to the instruction of our God,  
you people of Gomorrah!  
“The multitude of your sacrifices —  
what are they to me?” says the LORD.  
“I have more than enough of burnt offerings,  
of rams and the fat of fattened animals;  
I have no pleasure  
in the blood of bulls and lambs and goats.  
When you come to appear before me,  
who has asked this of you,  
this trampling of my courts?  
Stop bringing meaningless offerings!  
Your incense is detestable to me.  
New Moons, Sabbaths and convocations —  
I cannot bear your worthless assemblies.  
Your New Moon feasts and your appointed festivals  
I hate with all my being.  
They have become a burden to me;

I am weary of bearing them.  
When you spread out your hands in prayer,  
I hide my eyes from you;  
even when you offer many prayers,  
I am not listening.

Your hands are full of blood!

Wash and make yourselves clean.  
Take your evil deeds out of my sight;  
stop doing wrong.

Learn to do right; seek justice.  
Defend the oppressed.

Take up the cause of the fatherless;  
plead the case of the widow.

“Come now, let us settle the matter,”  
says the LORD.

“Though your sins are like scarlet,  
they shall be as white as snow;  
though they are red as crimson,  
they shall be like wool.

Word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

## CHOIR

*Out of the depths have I cried unto you.  
Lord, hear my voice, Lord, hear my voice.  
Lord, let your ear be attentive to my cry;  
Lord, hear my cry for mercy.*

*If you, O Lord, kept a record of sin,  
Who, then could stand?  
Lord, O Lord, who, then, could stand?*

*“Out of the Depths”*

*But with you, Lord, there is forgiveness.  
Therefore, you may be feared.  
I wait for the Lord, my soul does wait,  
In his word do I hope.*

*If you, O Lord, kept a record of sin,  
Who, then could stand?  
If you, O Lord, kept a record of sin,  
O who, then, could stand?*

*But with you, Lord, there is forgiveness.  
Therefore, we will not fear.  
I wait for the Lord, my soul does wait,  
And in his word do I hope, in his word do I hope.*

## **SECOND READING**

***Romans 12:1–8***

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. Do not conform 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.

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 faith God has distributed to each of you. For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us. If your gift is prophesying, then prophesy in accordance with your faith; if it is serving, then serve; if it is teaching, then teach; if it is to encourage, then give encouragement; if it is giving, then give generously; if it is to lead, do it diligently; if it is to show mercy, do it cheerfully.

Word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

**GOSPEL ACCLAMATION**

*2 Corinthians 9:8*

And God is able to bless you abundantly, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work.

**GOSPEL**

*John 15:1-8*

“I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.

“I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. If you do not remain in me, you are like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. This is to my Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.

The Gospel of the Lord. **Praise be to you, O Christ!**

**APOSTLES’ CREED**

**I believe in God, the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth.**

**I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried. He descended into hell. The third day he rose again from the dead. He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of God the Father Almighty. From there he will come to judge the living and the dead.**

**I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy Christian Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.**

**HYMN OF THE DAY**

*"See, He Comes, the King of Glory"*

**Hymn 494**

See, he comes, the King of glory, angels blazing round his throne,  
wielding wrath to those who spurned him, bearing blessings for his own.  
Do not dread that day, dear Christian! Do not fear his fearsome face,  
for the judge is our dear Savior; we are guarded by his grace.

See, he comes, the King of glory, naming deeds we did for him:  
feeding, clothing, sharing, caring, visiting, inviting in.  
We may ask, "When did we do this — show you, Lord, such courtesy?"  
He will say, "The least, the lowly — serving them was serving me."

See, he comes the King of glory, with a kingdom to award.  
We have not deserved or earned it; it's his gift, not our reward.  
All our works are but an off'ring of our gratitude and praise.  
We serve not so God will save us; we serve God because we're saved.

Till he comes, the King of glory, angels blazing round his throne,  
we will turn our eyes to heaven, tune our ears to trumpet's tone.  
But we won't neglect our neighbors needing comfort, shelter, love.  
Kindnesses for friends and strangers serve our Savior-King above.

**SERMON**

**HYMN**

*"O God, Your Hand the Heavens Made"*

**Hymn 751**

O God, your hand the heavens made and all that they contain;  
the world appeared at your command, and in it now you reign.  
The restless sea, the land, the sky your handiwork declare;  
the touch of your creative pow'r is present ev'rywhere.

To us are given gifts divine, all talents you have sent;  
inspire us now to use them well your kingdom to extend.  
We hold each gift a trust from you nor claim it as our own;  
we gratefully acknowledge, Lord, all things are yours alone.

Deliver us from selfish aims, true stewards we would be;  
endow us with a deep desire to live unselfishly.  
A full accounting we must give and see you face to face;  
let us approach your throne with joy, supported by your grace.

### PRAYER OF THE CHURCH

M: Lord God, our maker and preserver, we praise and thank you for all that you give us day after day.

C: **We are not worthy of all the mercies you show us.**

M: You have given us your precious Word to nourish our souls and to protect us from the temptations of the devil, the world, and our sinful nature.

C: **We thank you for those who teach and preach your saving truth at this place and everywhere. Grant them a rich measure of patience, wisdom, and love.**

M: Heavenly Father, we pray that you shield us from every kind of danger: sudden catastrophe, terrors of crime, and the pain of disease. Watch over those who travel by land, sea, and air. Keep our loved ones from whatever perils may threaten them.

C: **Heal those who are sick, cheer those who are sad, calm those who are distressed, and comfort all who are old and infirm.**

M: Bless our land, our people, and those who hold offices of high trust. Keep our government and schools upright and strong for the advancement of good citizenship and useful vocations, that we may enjoy your gifts of peace, security, and well-being.

**C: Grant your blessing to every nation on earth. Where there are wars, may there be peace. Where there is hatred, let it be healed. Where there is poverty, danger, or disaster, come with your almighty power to help and restore.**

*Special prayers and intercessions may follow.*

M: Hear us, Lord, as we bring to you our private petitions.

*Silent prayer.*

M: We bring these requests before you in the name of Jesus our Lord, and ask you to hear us. Take all that we have, our bodies and minds, our time and skills, our ministries and offerings, and use them to your glory.

**C: We give ourselves to you that we may serve you in whatever way is pleasing in your sight. Amen.**

#### **LORD'S PRAYER**

**Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever and ever. Amen.**

#### **CLOSING PRAYER**

M: O Lord God, our heavenly Father, pour out the Holy Spirit on your faithful people. Keep us strong in your grace and truth, protect and comfort us in all temptation, and bestow on us your saving peace, through Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

#### **BLESSING**

M: Brothers and sisters, go in peace. Live in harmony with one another. Serve the Lord with gladness.

The Lord bless you and keep you.  
The Lord make his face shine on you and be gracious to you.  
The Lord look on you with favor and give you peace. **Amen.**

## CLOSING HYMN

*“Lord, Help Us Walk Your Servant Way”*

**Hymn 737**

Lord, help us walk your servant way wherever love may lead  
and, bending low, forgetting self, each serve the other’s need.

You came to earth, O Christ, as Lord, but pow’r you laid aside.  
You lived your years in servanthood, in lowliness you died.

No golden scepter but a towel you place within the hands  
of those who seek to follow you and live by your commands.

You bid us bend our human pride nor count ourselves above  
the lowest place, the meanest task that waits the gift of love.

Lord, help us walk your servant way wherever love may lead  
and, bending low, forgetting self, each serve the other’s need

## OFFERING

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