

Preacher: Pastor Twyla

Scripture: Romans 12:1-8

¹ I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, on the basis of God's mercy, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your reasonable act of worship. ² Do not be conformed to this age, but be transformed by the renewing of the mind, so that 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 yourself more highly than you 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 not all the members have the same function, ⁵ so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another. ⁶ We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us: prophecy, in proportion to faith; ⁷ ministry, in ministering; the teacher, in teaching; ⁸ the encourager, in encouragement; the giver, in sincerity; the leader, in diligence; the compassionate, in cheerfulness.

If I asked you to describe a good life for me, what would you say? There would be a variety of answers we would hear in that kind of discussion. We might hear descriptions that include things like financial security, good health, travel and happiness. I couldn't argue against some of these things being on the list. Overall, most people, however, church and unchurch, would agree that the feelings of living a better and complete life would be at the very heart of living the good life. The apostle Paul gets at this in today's text.

Evidence suggests that the church in Rome was started by Jews who came to faith at the Pentecost event. Paul heard about the church plant and wrote to them to introduce himself and to give a sample of his message before traveling to Rome. The Roman church had no written New Testament because the Gospels were not being circulated in their final written form. So Paul's letter may well have been the first piece of Christian writing the Roman Christians may have seen.

The first half of the book, chapters 1-11, are of a theological nature describing what a Christian should believe. He laid out what should be the foundation of the Christian faith, stating: all people are sinful; Christ died to forgive sin; we are made right with God through faith; and this begins with a new life with a new relationship with Jesus Christ and God the Father.

Beginning with chapter 12, in summary, Paul gives clear practical guidelines. "The Christian life is not abstract theology unconnected from life, but it has practical implications that will affect how we choose to behave each day. It is not enough merely to know the gospel; we must let it transform our lives and let God impact every aspect of our lives." (The Life Application Bible, NIV)

Breaking this text down, then, Paul says transformation to the Good Life, the faithful Christian life, begins with sacrificial worship. He said, do not be conformed to this world. He was speaking to the people at that time of the past practice of sacrificing animals for forgiveness or to please God. He said that was not what God wanted from them, nor did it serve any purpose in bringing them personally closer to God. Instead, he said, that what God wanted was for them to offer themselves as a sacrifice...to lay themselves on the altar, giving all of themselves to God.

Of course, the sacrifice of animals has not been a part of our worship rituals; but we have other things that we need to choose to turn from doing in order to offer ourselves as a sacrifice to God. We should not conform to the things of our world that will separate us from God, and keep

us from being all that God created us to be. Sacrificial worship means putting God first, it requires giving our mind and our bodies to God.

Each and every day, Christians must choose, with their minds, to make sacrifices to follow and worship God, not just on Sunday mornings. Choosing to put God first, is an act of worship that transforms us for our daily living.

For Paul, the mind has a naturally sinful and rebellious leaning. To change this, to have our minds renewed so that our lives reflect the image of God within us, means to choose to sacrifice our selfish attitudes and desires. Do you make the purposeful choice each and every day to worship God, by putting him first in your life? What does that look like to you? What do you do to make sure this happens? Are you disciplined with certain daily efforts that put God ahead of all else in your life?

As I was looking for illustrations for this message, I came across this suggestion I thought I would share with you. It was written by a gentleman named David C. McCasland. "A saying among scientists who study the human brain is "Use it before you lose it." We have the power to help keep our brain fit and working well. Dr. Lawrence Katz, a neurologist at Duke University, urges people to perform daily mental exercises such as brushing your teeth with the nondominant hand or taking a new route to work to help stimulate the brain and keep it healthy. The goal is to replace unthinking routine with fresh awareness and new focus.

There's a lesson here for us as followers of Jesus Christ. Even the most valuable spiritual disciplines of Bible reading and prayer can become so habitual that our minds are not fully engaged.

To avoid slipping into a spiritual rut, he suggests, why not add Scripture memory to your daily devotional time? It's a mental effort designed to produce spiritual change. It's more than a brain game to memorize and meditate on the powerful Word of God." It changes us from the inside out.

Yes, "Transforming one's mind is a part of living authentically as a disciple of Christ. A renewed mind, changes us so that we are able to please, serve and honor God in ways that an undisciplined one is unable. A disciplined mind discerns the will of God." (Abingdon Preaching Annual, 2005) With renewed minds we're open to discovering and using the gifts God has given us, gifts and talents when used, bring God glory and further God's kingdom.

"In September 2001, Lisa Jefferson had an unexpected opportunity to be used by God. Her now well-known 15-minute conversation with a passenger on United Flight 93 forever changed the direction of her life. In her book "Called," she emphasizes that her listening skills and her ability to take charge and stay calm in a crisis were used to encourage fellow believer Todd Beamer in the last moments of his life.

She didn't ask to be used that way. But God saw a woman who was available and matched her with someone who was in need. Lisa now shares her story with whomever she can encourage believers to always be ready to serve.

Not only has God given us natural abilities, but He also equips every believer with spiritual gifts for the purpose of ministry. God doesn't use the unwilling—He won't force us to serve Him. His part is to equip us and empower and prepare us for service. Our part is to be faithful and available and aware of opportunities to use our gifts (Rom. 12:6)."

Paul goes on to make the point that as we individually become transformed by God, and discern God's will for us; the community of believers, is also transformed. We are bonded by the common thread of worshiping God, seeking God's will, and the passion to fulfill God's call to the community, the church.

Each one of us is a part of the body of Christ, united through the church; and each and every one of us is important to the body. "In the world, it is commonly said that doctors are more

valuable than nurses, and that principals are more important than teachers, and that those who work for pay are more esteemed than those who volunteer. In the church, we say that is nonsense! There is no pecking order in the Kingdom of God; all are equal, all are valuable, and all are necessary."

We divide the body when we decide some people, .or when we think we are, more important to the body. We do a disservice to ourselves and the greater body when we discount our value to the body, wishing we were like someone else, which leads us to more of what Paul has to say on this topic.

Paul says that the gifts and talents God gives each of us are to be used through the church. All gifts are valuable and vital to the work of the body to fulfill God's will through the church. We are purposely made with different talents in order to be well-rounded, complete in our work together. It is important for all of us to remember that "each of us have a particular function in the church, and if someone doesn't perform their function to the best of their ability – or if the person doesn't perform their function at all – then the entire body becomes less than what it could have been." (sermonwriter.com), less than what God intended it to be. Additionally, when we recognize and honor one another's gifts to be equally important to our own, we will not demand that everything will go our way. We will be more open to the new ways that God may be leading us.

"In the 60s and 70s, much was heard about the right of individuals to "do their own thing." People were encouraged to be themselves, to get to know themselves, and to express themselves.

Of course, a Christian should never pursue an unhealthy individualism that glorifies self and ignores God. But when we remember our responsibility to others and acknowledge our dependence on the Lord, He can use our distinctive skills and spiritual gifts for His glory.

Paul reminds believers that while they are part of one body, they all have different God-given abilities. Every child of God is obligated to recognize his or her particular talents and to use them fulfill God's service.

In a commercial airliner, the pilot, co-pilot, mechanics, engineers, and flight attendants all have different responsibilities. The passengers lives would be in great jeopardy if each crew member neglected his or her duties for another role! In much the same way, serious harm can come to a church if its members clamor for the position of another, or demand to have their own way.

We should not settle for less than God's best. It is more valuable to the church and God's will when we recognize the gift God has given each of us and we each "do your own thing." And do it well!"

So, Paul tells us that living the good life, if it is our intention to live a Christian life, to be whole as God intends for us to be, is a mind thing, a choice to live each moment in personal sacrificial worship of God, opening our minds to God as we nurture ourselves with spiritual disciplines, and thereby being transformed inwardly.

It is also a body thing. As we are transformed inwardly, we are also outwardly changed. Motivated by our passion for God and doing God's will, we use the gifts we have discovered that God has given us to glorify God and help to build God's kingdom in the everyday personal moments of our lives, and in our life together as the body of Christ. This should be our personal and corporate goal, beginning with each one of us making the choice to seek to live a good life. Amen.