

September 21, 2014
Pentecost 15

"God's Mercy Leads to Daily Worship"

ROMANS 12:1-8

Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God-- this is your spiritual act of worship. ² Do not conform any longer 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. ³ 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 measure of faith God has given you. ⁴ Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, ⁵ so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. ⁶ We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. If a man's gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith. 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.

The other day I was driving on Clark Avenue. In front of me was a truck pulling two trailers with large green bins full of newly harvested grapes. Our Central Coast has thousands upon thousands of grape vines producing thousands upon thousands bunches of grapes that will be processed into thousands of barrels of wine.

Jesus said that he is the Vine and we are the branches. Because you are connected to Jesus by God's mercy you are producing fruit in your daily life that brings glory to God. Picture in your mind Jesus as one large grape vine. Attached to him are millions and millions of branches from all over the world, producing fruit out of love for him and bringing glory to God.

The fruit you produce in your life does not earn God's favor. It results from your heavenly Father taking dead branches destined for eternal death and attaching them to Jesus his Son. Your life is dramatically altered and changed from being a dead branch who thought you could save yourself to a live branch that believes Jesus has done everything necessary to forgive you and rescue you and give you peace with your God. Every new day is an opportunity to sing, "Living, loving, dying, rising, Jesus did it all for me."

Please keep this picture of the Vine and the branches in mind as we take a closer at these verses from Romans 12. The first three chapters of Romans diagnose the problem of sin with the final sweeping conclusion, "All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God." The last part of chapter three and Chapters 4-11 show us the deliverance we have in Christ and the riches of God's mercy. Chapters 12-16 offer a description of the new life we are privileged to live for Christ because of all that he has done to rescue us and save us. Romans 12 begins by showing us the daily worship that fills our lives in response to God's

riches and mercies.

You worship daily as you give your life to the Lord

"Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God, this is your spiritual act of worship." To offer your body as a living sacrifice does not mean you mutilate your body or cut it with a knife until the blood flows or starve it or subject it to some mind altering drugs. Remember how the prophets of Baal cut themselves with knives to get the attention of their god. See how people in India do horrific things to their bodies to satisfy their multiple gods.

We offer our bodies as living sacrifices to the Lord when we go about our daily tasks of life. We use our bodies, however frail and weak they may be, to bring glory to God for the mercy he has shown to us. Psalm 118 begins with the words, "O give thanks unto the Lord for he is good and his mercy endures forever." God's mercy endures forever. It overwhelms us.

We don't have to mutilate our bodies to gain favor from our God and try to earn his mercy. This was done completely for us through Jesus. The body of Jesus was severely beaten, hung on a cross and suffered terribly for the sin of the world. 1 Peter 2:24 says, "He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness." Think of evil thoughts that entered into your mind this past week, thoughts of greed and selfishness, unkind thoughts towards others, maybe even questioned God when things don't work out the way you want them. Everything, absolutely everything, was placed on Jesus. His body bore the suffering for my sin so my body can now be used to bring glory to God every day and every hour and every minute of my life. 2 Corinthians 4 says, "We always carry around in our body the death of Christ, so that the of Christ may also be revealed in our body."

How do we offer our bodies as living sacrifices that are pleasing to our God? Listen to these next verses. "Do not conform any longer 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." We know how to offer our bodies as living sacrifices by following what God wants us to do. God's ways are always the best ways. You will face numerous choices in your life, numerous forks in the road, numerous opportunities or tests on whether you will follow the pattern or blueprint of this world, or follow the blueprint God gives you here in his Word. Psalm 34 says, "Taste and see that the Lord is good!" God's mercy to us in Christ is good, but so is the blueprint for how we are to live our lives to his glory.

How do you get better at making the right choices and thus presenting your body as a living sacrifice? You receive help from the Holy Spirit who constantly transforms you by the renewal of your mind. Think of how blessed you are to have the Holy Spirit constantly renewing you or reminding you how rich God's mercies are to you. We can wake up every morning and say, "Your mercies are new to me every morning, great is your faithfulness." What do I want in my life more than anything else? I want a deep appreciation of God's mercy to me a sinner. I want a deeper appreciation of just how much Jesus loves me. Listen to the prayer in Ephesians 3, "And I pray that you, being rooted and established in

love may have power with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ and to know this love that surpasses knowledge." Your daily worship of the Lord is driven or fueled by God's mercy to you, especially the width and length and height and breadth of Jesus love for you.

A little girl asked her daddy, "When you sleep you can wake up right?" Her daddy said, "Sure, you will wake up in the morning after you fall asleep tonight." But then she asked, "When you are awake, can you wake up more?" How would you answer that question? Can you awake and then be more awake? I guess people try to get more awake by drinking coffee or some energy drink. When you become more awake to all the mercies your God has to you in Jesus his Son, you are given amazing energy to want to offer your life as a living sacrifice to the Lord.

As I thought of seeing more of God's mercy each day, I thought back to a time when I saw these Northern Lights for the first time. My sister and I were sleeping in the back seat of the car as we were returning from a birthday party of one of our many relatives. My father stopped the car on the country road that went to our farm and turned off the lights. He told us to wake up and open our eyes. Both of us started crying and screaming in fear as we saw the night sky illuminated with shimmering green lights. Then my father told us not to be afraid. He said these are the Northern Lights. Just look at beautiful they are. They won't hurt you. In his mercy God allows us to see beauty in his creation, but his greatest beauty for us the shimmering glory of his Son that saves us.

You worship daily as you give your life to others

You have so much to give to the Lord because he has given to so much to you. You also have opportunity to give to others, especially other members of the body of Christ. "For by the grace given to me I say to everyone of you: Do not think of yourself more highly that you ought but rather think of yourself with sober judgments in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you." It is so easy to get caught up with ourselves and even drunk with ourselves that we fail to see the needs of other people and the opportunity to help them. You don't want to be drunk when you drive a car and you don't want to be drunk with yourself when you interact with other members of the body of Christ. The Bible says, "It is better to give than receive." Our selfish sinful nature tells us that it is better to receive than to give. In good marriages husbands and wives learn that giving is better than receiving. In healthy Christian congregations people learn to put the needs of their fellow Christians about their own needs.

In 2006 Steve Jobs, stood before the graduating students of Stanford and told them, "When I was 17, I read a quote...something like: 'If you live each day as if it was your last, someday you'll most certainly be right.' ...Since then, for the past 33 years, I have looked in the mirror every morning and asked myself: 'If today were the last day of my life, would I want to do what I am about to do today?'" Steve Jobs wanted to get as much out of each day as possible. He wanted the most for himself.

How different it is when God's mercy fills your life. You then look in the mirror and say, "How can I use this life of mine or this body that God has given me to help other people because my merciful God has given so much to me." As a member of the body of Christ,

you are privileged to have the Holy Spirit providing you with spiritual gifts that can be used for the benefit of other people. Paul mentions some of these gifts such as prophesying, serving, teaching, encouraging, contributing to the needs of others, governing diligently and showing mercy. I think of all those dear Christians I have seen in my life who have the gift of prophecy or boldly proclaiming the Word of God with deep conviction. I think of those who happily serve, those who have blessed me with their teaching, those who are so good at encouraging, those who generously give to the work of the Lord and to others in need. I think of those who govern. They are not afraid to step into positions of leadership because they know the Lord will help them. I think of those who are so good at showing mercy and kindness to others. It is such a blessing to be used by the Lord to serve other members of the body of Christ.

The worship service does not end at 11:00 AM today. It continues every day of your life. The riches of God's grace and mercy lead you to say, "What can I do to give glory to my God and how can I reach out to be a blessing to other people because my God has been so very merciful to me even when I have not deserved it." Amen.