



November 18-20, 2023 -- 25th Sunday after Pentecost

Preacher: Pastor Scott Oelhafen

Sermon Theme: **LORD – Make Me a Living Sacrifice for You**

1. Let me view your mercy
2. Let me demonstrate your mercy to others

Sermon Text: Romans 12:1

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

In the name of Jesus who loves us and has freed us by His blood, my dear Christian friends,

Have you ever seen a human sacrifice? I bet you didn't expect to come to church to hear THAT question. But, have you ever seen a human sacrifice? You don't need to go to a pagan temple deep in the jungle to see such a thing. Instead, come with me for a few minutes to a typical 4th grade classroom. Picture a 10-year-old boy sitting at his desk. Without warning, he notices a puddle between his tennis shoes and the front of his pants is all wet. He thinks his heart is going to stop because he can't understand how this happened. But, he does get that when the boys in his class find out, he'll NEVER hear the end of it. When the girls in his class hear about it, he thinks none of them will ever talk to him again. And when his teacher finds out, his public humiliation will be complete.

Now this boy is smart enough to pray. So he puts his head on his desk and prays this desperate prayer: Dear God. This is an emergency. I need Your help now. In a few moments, all the coolness I've ever accumulated since kindergarten will be gone. Give me a miracle. Save me.

As he looks up from his prayer, he sees his teacher walk toward him like she knows what's going on. His heart is filled with terror. Suddenly a classmate named Susie steps in front of the teacher carrying a goldfish bowl that's filled with water. She stumbles and inexplicably dumps the ENTIRE contents of the goldfish bowl in his lap. Of course, the boy pretends to be angry but all the while is silently praying: "Thank you LORD. Thank you LORD. Thank you LORD!" Can you imagine?

Now, instead of being the object of shame, the boy is the object of sympathy. The teacher rushes him down to the gym locker room and gives him fresh shorts. His classmates are on their knees cleaning up around his desk. The sympathy is intoxicating. But, of course, there's been an exchange. The ridicule that should belong to him, has now been transferred to someone else – Susie. She tries to help, but they tell her in a mocking voice: "Back off. Haven't you done enough?" Finally, at the end of the day, as they ride the bus, the boy says in a grateful voice to Susie: "You did that on

purpose, didn't you?" And Susie whispers back: "Yes, I did. I wet my pants once and wished someone would've helped me."

Now, that's what we call: a human sacrifice. To look for someone in need ... to put yourself in their place ... and then to sacrifice whatever you have, whatever it takes, to spare someone else. That's a human sacrifice or what St. Paul who wrote the words of our sermon text, describes as a "Living Sacrifice. We can only be living sacrifices when we truly understand what God's mercy is and why we have it. So when this sermon ends, I hope every one of us will pray our sermon theme: **LORD, Let Me Be a Living Sacrifice for you.** First of all, let me view Your mercy. And let me demonstrate Your mercy to others.

The book of Romans was written by the apostle Paul, a man who knew what God's mercy was all about. Romans is a Bible book with 16 chapters. Paul spends the first 11 chapters writing about the deep doctrine of God's love and he spends the final 5 chapters writing about how to put that deep doctrine of God's love into practice. That's why he starts out our sermon reading with the little word: "Therefore." ***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.*** On the basis of everything Paul has taught us about God's mercy in the first 11 chapters, here's where the rubber hits the road. Here's a time-tested and God-approved plan how to put God's mercy into practice.

Before we get too far, let's talk about mercy. But, let's not just talk about what limited human mercy looks like. Let's talk about what God's unlimited mercy looks like. The best definition for God's mercy I've ever heard is: "not getting what you deserve." In my opening example, the boy with a leaky bladder was going to get shame and embarrassment. Instead, he received help and sympathy. He was shown mercy by Susie. But, this mercy came at great cost. It cost Suzie big time. She took his shame and gave him great sympathy. What an exchange!

Isn't that precisely what the God-man Jesus did for every single one of us? Think about all the sins and all the transgressions we've committed against God and our neighbor. Was it really worth it? Of course not. When we think about all the things we've done wrong, we're ashamed. But, Jesus took more than our shame and embarrassment away. Jesus also took all the punishment we owed God for every stinkin' sin. He took our place on the cross and died to pay for our sins in full. What a heavenly exchange! He died that we might live. And He lives that we will never die. Isaiah the prophet said it best when he described how Jesus sacrificed and earned God's mercy for us: ***Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering, yet we considered him punished by God, stricken by him, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed (Isaiah 53:4-5).*** That's mercy, God's mercy – not getting what we deserve.

It amazes me how much more value can be added to a hotel room if they can include the words: “with a spectacular view.” People will pay significantly MORE to stay in a room with a view. Not many want a room with a view of an alley or a parking lot. They want to wake up on the ocean, see the mountains, or view the city skyline. Ahh -- wouldn’t that be great to always have a view like that?

But, St. Paul gives us a view that’s even higher and more spectacular. In this one verse from Romans, Paul gives us a view of heaven and the reason why we serve God. It’s a view better than what we can buy on booking.com. This view is purchased not with cash or credit cards, gold or silver, but with the holy precious blood and the innocent sufferings and death of Jesus. In other words, God wants us to live every moment of our lives heaven in view. God wants us to live with such confidence that if our next moment is our last, it will be our first in heaven. And that changes us by God’s Holy Spirit and gives us a real purpose to live every day for Him. As we remember our Baptism, as we take Holy Communion, as we tune into His Word each week, God lifts us up to see this view of heaven to fire us up to live, really live for God, here on earth.

So how do we do that? Yes, pray with me: **LORD, Let Me Be a Living Sacrifice.** Let me demonstrate Your mercy to others. Every day, we have many opportunities to thank God for his mercy and show that to demonstrate God’s mercy to others.

And that involves sacrifice, real sacrifice, personal sacrifice. “Sacrifice” is not a word we like to use or naturally demonstrate to others. When we use the word “sacrifice”, we think of Israelite priests who sacrificed animals on Old Testament altars. Once in the morning and once in the evening, these priests would sacrifice a lamb as burnt offerings for the sins of the people. What a picture that pointed to Christ. That sacrifice was total ... nothing was left because it was all given to the LORD. And sacrifices don’t happen anymore. Or do they?

My friends, if we call ourselves Christians, and we do, God calls each of us to be Living Sacrifices. We thank God by what we do. That means we daily, personally look for ways to love God and love every person He brings into our lives.

In sports, sacrifices are a big part of what makes a team work together and win. Think of baseball when the radio announcer says: “With the bases loaded and one out, there goes a long fly ball deep to left. Easy out. But, the man on third base tags up and scores. Sacrifice fly.” What a great concept. You’re out, but you help someone else get home for the good of the team. Certainly, sacrifices are not limited to sports. As Christian parents, we’re happy to make sacrifices for our children – maybe work extra hours to pay for Christian school at St. Paul’s or MVL, or even show mercy for some mistake. As Christian spouses, we’re happy to make sacrifices for each other – maybe even give up the remote control and show mercy by closing our mouths in the heat of the moment. As church members, we willingly make sacrifices like spend time ushering, serving donuts, volunteering, or generously giving our church offerings so more souls will learn of Jesus and heaven. True sacrifice doesn’t involve just the

leftovers, but giving the best of what God has given us. It's called total commitment. It's the way Paul says we worship God every single day.

You may not have the opportunity this Thanksgiving week to spill a goldfish bowl to save someone from embarrassment. But, I promise you, if you just open your eyes, God will give you the opportunity to serve someone as a living sacrifice. At that moment, don't just think of the boy with the wet pants I spoke about at the beginning of my sermon. Think of the God-man on the cross who showed us mercy so we may gratefully bring a little of God's mercy to our own little corner of the world. Amen.