



HELP WANTED – Week #2 – November 16-18, 2024

Preacher: Pastor Scott Oelhafen

Sermon Theme: Live a Life of Humbl Christian Sacrifice

Sermon Text: 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. ²Do 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. ³For 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. ⁴For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, ⁵so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. ⁶We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us. If your gift is prophesying, then prophesy in accordance with your^[a] faith; ⁷if it is serving, then serve; if it is teaching, then teach; ⁸if it is to encourage, then give encouragement; if it is giving, then give generously; if it is to lead,^[b] do it diligently; if it is to show mercy, do it cheerfully.

Dear fellow workers in God's kingdom,

Have you noticed HELP WANTED signs popping up all over Brown County? They're posted on windows of local restaurants, storefronts, and they're even online. It's as if businesses are shouting: "We need your help. We can't do this alone." It's a constant reminder of the scarcity of workers and the pressing need for those willing to serve.

But, in our sermon reading from Romans, chapter 12, there's a proverbial "HELP WANTED" sign posted in the kingdom of God. It's still true in churches across the country (not just ours): 80% of a church's work and offerings are still supported by 20% of the people. We're trying to grow that positively with our three-week Stewardship series that highlights the need for more volunteers. Yes, stewardship involves giving our money to God, but it also involves serving God with our time and talents. And as we respond to this call for help, be motivated not by law or guilt, but by God's love and mercy. Think about it. God actually wants to involve us in ministry. And believe me – there are many different areas in our church and school that need our volunteer help: from ushering and music, to helping in the office and child care, and so much more. We'll be talking about that more at the end of our service. God gives each of us the privilege of serving Him as we serve others in the church, in our homes, and in our

communities. Jesus Himself said: ... ***whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me (Matthew 25:40)***. The Christian life is one of service. So what does our personal service to Jesus look like? Younger parents – did you involve your kids in raking your lawn these past few weeks? So how did that go? Really 🙄 Oh, I’m sure their little hearts were in the right place ... for a little while. Years ago, I recruited my 5-year-old twins to rake the lawn with me. Ever do that with your kids or grandkids? At first they were all excited to help me in our yard covered with leaves. But, admittedly raking leaves is hard and thankless work. I remember the twins spreading more leaves around the yard than they actually helped me pick up. Yet, that wasn’t the point. As a dad, to this day I’m sincerely proud of them. They helped our family. Now you know how God feels about us, His children, when we answer the call to “Help” serve in His kingdom. As our Heavenly Father, He’s proud of us when we engage in that Christian service and I pray that simple fact inspires us to gratefully do more for the God who loved us and gave himself for us.

As we take a closer look at our sermon reading in Romans Chapter 12, I pray you join me and many others here at St. Paul’s as we **Live a Life of Humble Christian Sacrifice**. First, we remember Christ’s sacrifice for us. Then, we willingly sacrifice for him.

Our sermon reading talks about sacrifice – and that’s a word that might seem foreign to our 21st century ears. The Old Testament temple in Jerusalem must have been quite a place! God’s people came there week after week, month after month, and year after year. It was the center of the worship life for God’s chosen people. Countless prayers winged their way to heaven from that spot. Many of our heroes of faith spent time in that temple like King Solomon, Isaiah, and Jeremiah. But, not everything was so pleasant in God’s house in Old Testament times as God’s people didn’t come empty-handed. For one thing, there must have been plenty of times when the temple smelled more like a slaughterhouse than a place of worship. Just think of all the bloody sacrifices that were made. Thousands upon thousands of animals were killed right there on the altar of God. What a graphic and gruesome sight. And that was God’s point that sin demanded payment, and that payment is life. Knives flashed. Blood flowed. Life given. And the smoke of those sacrifices blew around like a raging New Ulm barbeque. At a time when wealth was measured in how many animals a person had, many of those animals would be burned to a crisp in sacrifice to God. What would that look like today? It’s as if our ushers would bring tonight’s offering collection (and your personal offering envelope and mine) to the front of church and burn it all up. I think it would take an amazing amount of faith and trust that God knew what he was doing.

Obviously, our New Testament way of giving to God is much different. God told us so. We don’t sacrifice animals. But, we do give back to God our best: our time, talents, and

treasures. Our life is God's gift to us. What we do with that life is our gift back to him. It's our sacrifice to God. Yet, as the hymn (CW 398) reminds us the significance of those Old Testament sacrifices: *Not all those blood of beasts on Israel's altars slain could give the guilty conscience peace or wash away the stain.* No one can pay for sin by what we do or what we sacrifice, but only by Christ's sacrifice alone. The only way to **Live a Life of Humble Christian Sacrifice** is to first remember Christ's sacrifice.

Paul begins our sermon reading with the word: **Therefore**. And that's a pretty big word. Basically, the word **Therefore** means: "based on everything I just told you in the first eleven chapters of Romans, now I'll apply it". And Paul said plenty about what God did to save us. He told us in Romans 6:23: ***the wages of sin is death but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.*** Our sins of selfishness, of thinking our time and talents belong exclusively to us earn us nothing but death and an eternity separated from him in hell. But, Paul reminded us time and time again that God gave His best. He sacrificed His Son Jesus on the cross who died for our sins and was raised again making up for our sins, one sacrifice for all time. Jesus is our why. Jesus is the reason why we willing serve Him today with a grateful and willing heart. It's why we give of our offerings and why we volunteer. No matter what we do or where we go, remember God's mercy not giving us what we deserve, and keep Jesus and His saving love front and center. That's what it means to **Live a Life of Humble Christian Sacrifice**.

Paul said it this way: ***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.*** Instead of bringing animals to God, we bring our offerings and our skillset. And when we do, it's actually part of our worship as we tell God he is worth more than anything.

So how do we do that? Paul goes on to say: ***Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.*** As Christian people, we don't go along with the peer pressure of our world that tells us to put ourselves first and give to God the leftovers or when it's convenient. In other words, we live in the world. We are not of the world.

He goes on to say: ***Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment*** That means we take an honest look in the mirror and see that God is the creator and we are His creation. We were made to serve him. So we do with great humility, valuing others more than we value ourselves.

Paul writes: ***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.*** As part of the Christian church, we

work together like the human body to **Live a Life of Humble Sacrifice**. We work closely, depending on each other, even when the devil makes it hard.

And we all don't have the same gifts when it comes to serving God. Paul said: ***‘We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us. If your gift is prophesying, then prophesy in accordance with your^(a) faith; ^(b) if it is serving, then serve; if it is teaching, then teach; ^(c) if it is to encourage, then give encouragement; if it is giving, then give generously; if it is to lead,^(d) do it diligently; if it is to show mercy, do it cheerfully.*** I wish we had more time today to talk about these seven different areas of Christian service. Yet, it's clear, we serve God with the different gifts God has given us.

And we go all out in serving God. We don't hold anything back. Maybe this will show you what I mean. In years gone by, when poor young boys made money selling newspapers on street corners, one ten-year-old stood on a corner in New York City, one cold morning, trying to sell the Sunday edition. But, business was slow and he didn't sell one newspaper. On the opposite side of the street stood an old brick church. The boy crossed the street to warm himself inside. He sat down in one of the back pews as the pastor began his sermon. The pastor preached an inspiring sermon about the poor widow who gave all she had as an offering to God. The pastor spoke of Jesus who gave his perfect life so sinners are now forgiven. He died on a cross so believers will live with God forever in heaven. The pastor ended his sermon by saying: "Jesus gave his all for us. What will we give him?" With that the offering plate was passed. As an usher approached the boy in the back pew, the boy asked the usher to put the offering plate on the floor. People around him began to look at the boy in the back. And then the boy directly addressed the pastor. He said: "Pastor, I don't have any money because I didn't sell any newspapers today." But, then the boy did something surprising. He stepped into the offering plate and said: "But, pastor, Jesus can have me." Do you get his point? Jesus doesn't just want our time, talents, and treasures. He wants us, our hearts – total commitment.. Jesus got the heart of this boy. What will he get from us? Help Wanted. God bless us as together, we **Live Lives of Humble Christian Sacrifice, for Christ**. Amen.