

I.N.I.

20th Sunday after Pentecost
October 6, 2013
Romans 12:1-8

In Christ Jesus, whose sacrifice of Himself for us will motivate us to want to sacrifice ourselves for Him, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

“Haveta” or “wanta.” Which will it be? In our confirmation class we are always telling our confirmands that the Gospel of Jesus will make us “wanta” Christians, not “haveta” ones.

When we realize what we are by nature, lost and condemned, headed for hell and damnation and then see what Christ has done for us and made of us--redeemed and restored, forgiven and righteous we will be moved to **WANT TO** respond with lives of thanksgiving and service.

And that is Paul’s message for us this morning.

Paul begins by beseeching, that is “urging, begging” his readers. Urging and begging what? That by God’s mercies we be nonconformists! What’s that?

I grew up in the 60’s. During that era there were a lot of nonconformists, there were called hippies! They lived differently, they dressed differently. They didn’t want to live by the norms and ways of society but wanted to live by their own self-chosen ways. Is that what Paul means here?

No, Paul is not saying live by your own self-chosen rules and ways, but he also is saying do not conform to the world’s ways either. Rather live by God’s ways.

And so this morning we ask---

ARE YOU A NONCONFORMIST FOR CHRIST?

We read again vs. 1: **I BESEECH YOU THEREFORE, BRETHREN, BY THE MERCIES OF GOD, THAT YOU PRESENT YOUR BODIES A LIVING SACRIFICE, HOLY, ACCEPTABLE TO GOD, WHICH IS YOUR REASONABLE SERVICE.**

Paul does not say “you must, or you should” directing the Christian to himself. No, rather he directs us to Christ, to the mercies of God and the great self-sacrifice that Jesus gave for us. When we really meditate from the heart, on this great self-sacrifice that Jesus gave for us, we will be moved to “present our bodies a living sacrifice to God.” And that is our first point---

GOD’S MERCIES WILL MOTIVATE US TO

I: SACRIFICE NOT SELF-SERVICE

When the Old Testament believer heard of sacrifice he thought of a lamb or bull or goat being sacrificed. He thought of bringing grain offerings or first-fruits offerings or a tithe for the Lord.

We might think of sacrificing our time, talents and offerings also. Time to sit in the pews. Time and talents to help in and around the church grounds and offerings given. Is that what Paul means “as a living sacrifice”?

Yes it includes those things, but it includes even more. It means life for life. Christ gave us His. Now we will want to give Him ours. Proverbs 23:26 reads: **MY SON, GIVE ME YOUR HEART, AND LET YOUR EYES OBSERVE MY WAYS.**

This is not some legal requirement to gain favor with God. We are motivated by God’s great mercy and grace to us in Christ to give of ourselves in thanksgiving and love to Him. It is not something else brought as a substitute sacrifice. It is ourselves. It is not self-service, but sacrificial service to others. And it is not a dead sacrifice, but a living one.

That means it is not simply sitting in the pews with a mechanical going through the motions of worship, but a worship from the heart. It is an attitude of giving glory and praise to God in everything we think, say and do, not just on Sunday morning in church. It means being led to repent of our sins and casting ourselves upon Jesus and from the heart trusting in Him alone for forgiveness.

It also means---

II: TRANSFORM RATHER THAN CONFORM

We read vs. 2: **AND DO NOT BE CONFORMED TO THIS WORLD, BUT BE TRANSFORMED BY THE RENEWING OF YOUR MIND, THAT YOU MAY PROVE WHAT IS THAT GOOD AND ACCEPTABLE AND PERFECT WILL OF GOD.**

When a person becomes a believer in Christ, a child of God through faith worked in his heart through the Holy Spirit a blessed, dramatic change or conversion takes place. He is transformed. The word in the Greek is metamorphosis. Perhaps you know what that is. It is the change from a rather drab, fat, fuzzy earthbound caterpillar into a beautiful butterfly now soaring in the sky.

So also the Christian soars forth from the ashes of spiritual death and sin and is a new creation in Christ. This happens when the Means of Grace, the Gospel in Word and Sacrament works in the heart of the individual.

Do you think the beautiful, multi-colored Monarch butterfly would ever want to go back to be that fat, fuzzy, slow crawling earthbound caterpillar again? So why would we want to conform again to this world once we have been transformed “by the renewing of our mind” by God’s Word?

We as believers know that “all things work together for good to those that love God.” As believers in Jesus we bask in the grace and mercy of God which showers upon us full and free forgiveness day after day after day. As children of God in Christ we know that we can rely on the Lord God for everything and that nothing is too great for God to accomplish or work out in our lives.

Why would we want to conform to the world’s ways of relying upon ourselves, serving self, getting only what is best for me, doing only what I think is best, when we have tasted and experienced God’s great grace which is always best for us?

By living as transformed believers we are putting God’s promises to the test, as Paul says, “proving what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.”

Finally Paul says that---

GOD’S MERCIES WILL MOTIVATE US TO III: HARMONY NOT STRIFE

We read vs. 3-8: **FOR I SAY, THROUGH THE GRACE GIVEN TO ME, TO EVERYONE WHO IS AMONG YOU, NOT TO THINK OF HIMSELF MORE HIGHLY THAN HE OUGHT TO THINK, BUT TO THINK SOBERLY, AS GOD HAS DEALT TO EACH ONE A MEASURE OF FAITH. FOR AS WE HAVE MANY MEMBERS IN ONE BODY, BUT ALL THE MEMBERS DO NOT HAVE THE SAME FUNCTION, SO WE, BEING MANY, ARE ONE BODY IN CHRIST, AND INDIVIDUALLY MEMBERS OF ONE ANOTHER. HAVING THEN GIFTS DIFFERING ACCORDING TO THE GRACE THAT IS GIVEN TO US, LET US USE THEM: IF PROPHECY, LET US PROPHECY IN PROPORTION TO OUR FAITH; OR MINISTRY, LET US USE IT IN OUR MINISTERING; HE WHO TEACHES, IN TEACHING; HE WHO EXHORTS, IN EXHORTATION; HE WHO GIVES, WITH LIBERALITY; HE WHO LEADS, WITH DILIGENCE; HE WHO SHOWS MERCY, WITH CHEERFULNESS.**

There cannot be harmony and unity when someone thinks of himself as being better than others, or more important than others. And that is the natural way. Everyone of us has our pride. Sinful pride exalts itself. The sinful ego thinks only of itself. But when we have been transformed by the Holy Spirit we will look upon others as more important than ourselves, like Jesus did when He came into this world to serve and not to be served.

When we “**think soberly, as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith**” we realize that we are all the same by nature: lost in sin, dead in unbelief, unable to save ourselves. That without God’s grace in Christ we would be headed for damnation and still be children of Satan. It is all grace. How dare we think more highly of ourselves.

But even as we are all the same by nature, we are also all different in gifts. Paul now paints for us a mental picture in visualizing the working relationship that is to exist among members of a Christian congregation. He draws the picture of the human body. We have one body, yet many

members. And these many members of our body have different functions. So also even though we are all one body in Christ, we are all different in our work and function.

Paul now lists 7 different gifts that we as individual members of Christ's body have. Not everyone has all of these gifts, but everyone has some of these gifts to make the body function.

- 1) **Prophecy:** meaning proclaiming God's Word. If you have the gift to speak the Word, speak only the word, not your own. Thereby you give glory to God and serve the whole body.
- 2) **Ministry:** meaning service. Literally it reads: "service in our serving." This is probably the least exalted gift but one of the most needed. It is not leading, proclaiming, teaching, but simply serving one another. What a selfless gift to have and what a necessary gift for the body.
- 3) **Teaching:** Jesus gave us this commission to "**teach them to observe all things that I have commanded you.**" What a blessed gift to have and to use—to teach God's Word to others.
- 4) **Exhortation:** meaning encouragement. Is this an insignificant gift? Hardly. It is that special gift of some Christians to impart just the right words of comfort and encouragement at just the right time and in just the right amount without being overbearing.
- 5) **Giving:** Giving with liberality, meaning with generosity or simplicity of heart. Not worrying about shortchanging oneself or about keeping enough back for oneself. A special gift only a few have.
- 6) **Leadership:** Lead with diligence meaning lead with eagerness, zeal and effort. Not unwillingly, but with God-given zeal.
- 7) **Mercy:** Showing mercy cheerfully. What a gift that is. Not thinking "here we go again." But happily showing pity on others and not worrying if we were too lax or too firm, or if we will receive something in return.

All of these gifts are giving to others, doing for others. That is really being a nonconformist. That is being like Christ. That is living for Christ.

We all want to grow in our sanctification, our Christian living. Paul tells us the only way to do that is "by the mercies of our God." The more we hear God's Word, study God's Word, meditate on God's Word of love and forgiveness in Christ, the more we look to see what Jesus has done for us the more we will grow in our love and appreciation for Jesus and our love for each other.

Our prayer is that the Spirit lead us all to grow in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior so that we will also grow in the use of the gifts that our Lord has graciously given to each of us so that our congregation, as one body, functions to the glory of God for the welfare of all of its members. And also so that the Lord would add more and more members to His body by using us as living sacrifices in bringing His Word to those who do not know Him as their Lord and Savior.

We pray this in Jesus' name.

Amen.