

Introduction

Check-in & Introductions

Generosity in Sacrifice

Sermon Reflection Notes

We've heard a lot over the last several weeks about generosity, about how we give ourselves to God. We've heard about gratitude, ministry, prayer and this week, the topic is sacrifice. This is a subject that might make modern people like us a little queasy. We hear that word and often think about Old Testament sacrificial rituals of burnt offerings, or grain offerings, or sin or reparation offerings; we think of animal sacrifices and even the awfulness of Abraham being asked to sacrifice his son Isaac. But even in the Old Testament, sacrifices weren't all about punishment. Some were offered in celebration or to consecrate a sacred space. Sacrifices were less about punishment and more about drawing closer to God. Even then though, people got things wrong. In Hosea, chapter 6, we hear the story of the Northern Kingdom of Israel, mired in military trouble, who thought "Maybe if we return to God, God will fix this whole thing." But God says "I don't think so...your faithfulness is 'like the morning dew,' there and gone. *'For I desire mercy and not sacrifice, and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings'.*"

In other words, you can make all the sacrifices you want, but without a sincere heart, it's meaningless. Going through the motions means nothing unless it flows from a genuine desire to be transformed in heart, mind, soul, and strength. If it doesn't lead to mercy, steadfast love, and compassion, it misses the point entirely. If you don't want your heart to be more closely aligned with God's heart, it's all for naught.

The scripture today has Paul repurposing the sacrifice language to align with Hosea...present your bodies as a sacrifice, as your act of worship. Use your physical body for God's service. It's an embodied religion. If you want to love God, use your bodies to love your neighbor.

Paul spends 11 chapters going on about 'we are all sinners, every last one of us.' But God won't give up on us. God, in Jesus, entered this world to come along side us, even dying for us while we were still sinners. God's grace is deep and his mercy is wide, lavish, infinite. And then, Jesus rose from the dead, so that we might be raised to new life through him. No matter our worst sin, there is nothing *"neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord."* Therefore, because God's mercy is so great, present your bodies that have been redeemed by God's mercy, to be used for God. If you love God, then love your neighbor. To love your neighbor, is to worship God.

John Wesley said *"The essence of Methodism is holiness of heart and life."* He wasn't worried about the Methodist movement ceasing to exist. He was concerned instead with it only existing as a 'dead sect,' having the form of religion without the power, the faith and the action. Methodism is a both/and tradition in a world with an either/or mentality. We worship AND serve. We are a religion of the heart and head—and the rest of the body too. Paul goes on to say "don't be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind." Martin Luther King Jr. called this being a 'transformed nonconformist.' Allow God to

engage in some neuroplasticity. Seek transformation as a 'passive imperative' by letting God work, letting God give you a different way of thinking. And 'you' is plural. It's not mere individuals, but the community, being transformed together.

Passively allowing yourself to become transformed nonconformists is hard work. But that is how we discern the will of God. Presenting our bodies and minds for God's service and transformation is how we discern what is good, acceptable, and perfect. This week the sermon is about sacrifice, but the message is not about giving to the church, or presenting your goats, or even sacrificing 10% of your income to God. The message of sacrifice is to give yourself. For there is no part of you that is not being redeemed by the mercy of Jesus Christ—heart, mind, soul, or strength. Our whole life belongs to God. Therefore, because of mercy, present your body to God, and be transformed.

Scripture

Romans 12:1-8

¹I 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. ²Do 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. ³For 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. ⁴For as in one body we have many members and not all the members have the same function, ⁵so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another. ⁶We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us: prophecy, in proportion to faith; ⁷ministry, in ministering; the teacher, in teaching; ⁸the encourager, in encouragement; the giver, in sincerity; the leader, in diligence; the compassionate, in cheerfulness.

Discussion Questions

1. How have you heard the word sacrifice used in Bible stories and in the life of the church?
Is the word sacrifice a word you use when talking about your faith? Why or why not?
2. God says in Hosea 6:6 (and several other places) *"I desire mercy and steadfast love, not sacrifice, and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings."* What is it God really desires if it isn't sacrifices? What is God looking for?
3. Pastor Ron said God's mercy is so great, so abundant, so frequent, that we therefore should present our bodies that have been redeemed by God's mercy, to be used for God. If we love God, then we love our neighbor. To love our neighbor is to worship God.
 - a. What is required to actually, truly, love our neighbors?
 - b. What responsibilities are incurred when we do, in fact, love our neighbors?
 - c. What are ways we offer 'sacrifices' instead of mercy and steadfast love to both our neighbors and therefore God?

4. Paul said: *"don't be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind."*
Martin Luther King Jr. said we are to be 'transformed nonconformists,' stating in his book of sermons *Strength to Love*, that the salvation of the world will come *"not through the complacent adjustment of the conforming majority, but through the creative maladjustment of a nonconforming minority."*
 - a. What is the point Paul and MLK are making?
 - b. What does it mean to be "transformed nonconformists"?
5. Pastor Ron said in the sermon that "Passively allowing yourself to become transformed nonconformists is hard work. But that is how we discern the will of God." How is that lived out in life? Are there life experiences where we have been able to pray "Not my will, but thy will, O God"?
6. Nonconformity is creative when it is controlled and directed by a transformed life. It is constructive when it embraces a new mental outlook. In 2026, where are we, as Christians, called to be transformed in our thinking? Where are we, as Christians, called to be nonconformists?

Closing Prayer

Holy God, who calls the worlds into being, who calls us into Christ's church; we thank you for the church that is our true home, for the mission of the church that is our true joy, and for the ministry of the church that is our proper task.

We thank you for the ministry of the church, for its steadfastness over time, for its faithful witness in the struggle, for justice and peace, and for its durable walk in caring ways.

We thank you for the many ways of ministry that are faithfully practiced in praise of you out beyond our range of acceptance – for those more radical than us; for those more cautious than us; for those in traditions strange to us; for faith families who care in ways other than our own.

We pray your mighty spirit upon us, that we may more fully engage our baptism – that we may accept the costs that belong to our life with you, that we may embrace the grace that only you can give. Move us beyond ourselves, beyond our favorite cliches, our tired resentments, our worn-out-habits. Move us away from conformity and into your newness. Transform us, mold us by your love.

Make us light, make us ready, make us open that our lives become sacrifices transformed by your grace. We pray in the name of Jesus, Amen.

"We are to be transformed nonconformists."