

Sermon: Romans 12:1-8

Body of Christ

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First Presbyterian Church

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Romans 12:1-8 (NRSV)

I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God— what is good and acceptable and perfect.

For 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. For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another. We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us: prophecy, in proportion to faith; ministry, in ministering; the teacher, in teaching; the exhorter, in exhortation; the giver, in generosity; the leader, in diligence; the compassionate, in cheerfulness.

Bodies are weird. They come in all sorts of shapes and sizes and abilities. Some are long and lengthy. Other are short and resolute. Where some bodies celebrate curves, other bodies shine in lean silhouettes. Some bodies are covered in the most luxurious ebony complexion, others glow with a pale cream skin. Some are athletic and spry, other are docile and modest. And the minds that are housed within our bodies come to life in different settings. Some clearly delineate numbers, while others embrace the whimsy of colors. Some hold tight to the details of stories and others remember broad concepts and ideas.

In our scripture this morning we are diving into Paul's letter to the early church in Rome. In his writings, Paul celebrates the depth and uniqueness of our bodies. He reminds us of our connection to God through our bodies. As we engage our minds, spirits, and physical bodies in worshiping God. In fact, Paul takes his discussion of bodies one step further and compares the church family and our communities to a body. Paul celebrates the diversity of who we are and the variety of ways that God has created our bodies to express themselves.

We as a society, are not as quick to celebrate our differences. In fact, we have been socialized to downplay our differences and overstate our similarities. You see this often in politics where a politician will say "you either agree with us and are part of our team or you disagree with us and are one of *them!*" Implied in this statement is that being one of them is bad and conforming to the group think is good. Or look at fashion trends. Have you ever looked back at picture and thought "why did I think that was cool?!" But you dressed similarly to your friends. You were convinced that polyester was the perfect fabric and that vast amounts of hairspray was just what your morning routine needed. Or when

we think back to school, kids who don't learn like the majority of their classmates, are more likely to fall behind and not ask questions when they don't understand, out of a fear of being different.

This week I was listening to the podcast Code Switch and they were talking about this exact idea, that we gravitate towards what we know. They talked with researchers whose data shows that friendship is largely determined by proximity. You get to know the people nearby. And in the United States that largely means homogeneous communities. People who look and think like you. The data also shows that the more diverse the school and neighborhood that a kid grows in up, the more likely that kid would have cross racial friendships as adults. We can extrapolate this out to suggest that the more we are exposed to all forms of diversity—diversity of thought, diversity of race, diversity of gifts, diversity of orientation—the more we are exposed to all forms of diversity, the better we are at being the body of Christ.

This doesn't mean we simply go on a hunt to "collect" those who can add diversity to our bubble. The celebration of a diverse body of Christ begins first by looking inward. Our scripture today calls us to being a living sacrifice. Sacrifice is not a term we regularly embrace. In fact the word has a negative connotation. A giving up, going without, denial of self. And in our culture that drastically celebrates individually over community, we are not quick to embrace the idea of being sacrificial. But to Paul, being a living sacrifice is a positive thing. It's conducting our lives—our whole lives, not just our Sunday morning lives—in a state of worship towards God. Being a living sacrifice is a process of discernment and living into God's calling in our lives. Living in a way that makes people wonder and take note that there is something different.

This past week I invited you to take time to pause. I hope you found this exercise helpful. I found myself more aware of the joys and gifts of God throughout my day. In fact, on Friday as it rained, I found myself thinking, I need to remember that for tonight when I write down my joys. When we intentionally pause and intentionally reorient ourselves towards celebrating God, we become more aware of God and we reflect God. This intentionality helps to celebrate the *whole* person we are meant to be.

As we talk about being a living sacrifice—living a whole life that celebrates God—we also must be intentional in reorienting ourselves. When we are mindful of God in the everyday parts of our lives, we are more likely to see the variety of ways that God created us to shine as a part of the body of Christ. AND we are more likely to celebrate the unique ways God differently made all of us in God's own image.

This dance of seeing God at work in our lives and our self-initiated work at being our full selves is hard. It is a balance of not passively waiting for God to levitate our bodies into action, but also not growing our ego in self-aggrandizement. Martin Luther King Jr. states this well in his famous *Letter From A Birmingham Jail*:

"Human progress never rolls in on wheels of inevitability; it comes through the tireless efforts of men willing to be co-workers with God, and without this hard work, time itself becomes an ally of the forces of social stagnation. We must use time creatively in the knowledge that the time is always ripe to do right."

When we live in a way that celebrates the whole person who God created us to each be—not just the parts particularly affirmed by society—we are living in a way that worships the creating God. This is not a one-time transformation, something we do and then check off our list. This is hard work. This is a continual act of worship. Of constantly celebrating who God has made us to be at every age and stage of life. Perhaps this means living into a new passion at a later stage in life or setting down a

commitment that is no longer life giving or edifying to the larger community. Perhaps this means we need to be quicker to listen than we are to speak. Or seeking out those nagging desire that we've intentionally ignored.

We weren't all designed to be teachers, but we celebrate those who are dynamic teachers. We weren't all designed to be ministers, but we celebrate those who are brought to life in ministering. We weren't all designed to be in caring professions, but we celebrate those who thrive in their generosity of compassion. Who has God created you to be? We celebrate that *you* are part of this body of Christ. For EACH ONE OF US has a purposeful presence in this community. And for that, we praise God.