

## “Called to be One”

Romans 12:1-8, Matthew 16:13-20

We are gathered here to worship this morning - to worship and praise God. In today's First Lesson, Apostle Paul appeals to the Christians in Rome to offer “Spiritual Worship” to God. What does he mean by “spiritual worship”? It is offering ourselves to God as “a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God” (12:1), not just one hour on Sundays.

We have heard the words, “to offer ourselves as a holy and living sacrifice” before. Do you recall when? It's during communion. In the Great Thanksgiving, which starts with “The Lord be with you; and also with you,” we remember Christ's ministry on earth, his death and resurrection and the night in which he gave himself up for us. Then the pastor says, “And so, in remembrance of these your mighty acts in Jesus Christ, we offer ourselves in praise and thanksgiving as a **holy and living sacrifice....**”

So we offer ourselves to God as a holy and living sacrifice because of all God has done through and in Christ. That is “spiritual worship.”

Paul continues, “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.” What is the life conformed to this world; and what is the life transformed by the renewing of our minds?

The life conformed to this world could be described as life centered around “I and we.” Life transformed by the renewing of our minds is life with God at its center.

Life conformed to this world  
by the

our minds

I (we) seek **my** (our) interests.  
will.

All I (we) have is **mine** (ours).  
comes from **God**.

My (our) life belongs to **me** (us).  
to **God**.

Life transformed

renewing of

I seek **God's**

All I have

My life belongs

It is interesting to note that Paul says that we must be transformed by the renewing of our “minds.” He doesn’t say, “be transformed by the renewing of our hearts,” rather he focuses in on our “minds.” Our thinking must be changed or transformed from the old way, Life conformed to this world, which denies God, does not seek God, does not honor God or does not accept God’s salvation offered through Christ Jesus. When our thinking is changed, it affects our hearts and actions. Our action transformed by the renewing of our minds is to offer our life as a living and holy sacrifice, which is our “spiritual worship.”

Simply said, Apostle Paul is calling us to live a life with God at its center. Does such a life separate us from “others” or from the secular world? Yes, or No? Both? We are not to be conformed to “this world,” but we are to live in this world as a holy and living sacrifice” to God.

A pastor I know says he has three congregations. One at a diner in his town, where he often eats breakfasts. The second at a sports club, where he goes once or twice a week. The third is the congregation he is appointed to. In each place, he is a pastor - a transformed life in the midst of the world and community.

In that sense, we are a living and holy sacrifice wherever we go: work, school, the neighborhood in which we live, home, and various clubs, communities, societies or organizations we belong to. We carry Christ with us, which is our spiritual worship after our Sunday worship service ends.

In the next section of today’s lesson, Apostle Paul says how such a life affects the body of Christ. If each of us tries to live with God at the center of our lives, we would show humility when interacting with one another. We won’t think of ourselves more highly than we ought. Even though we may be blessed with different spiritual gifts, according to the grace given to us, and may have different functions in the body of Christ, “we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another.” (vs. 5)

Paul calls all members to recognize the basic equality we share as members of one body - the body of Christ. No one is above the others or below them. Paul calls on us to recognize the wide variety of individual strengths or gifts available to be used to aid and benefit the entire church - the whole body of Christ. If you are a teacher, teach well. If your gift is preaching, speak with as much faith as God has given you. If God has given you leadership ability, take the responsibility seriously. If your gift is giving, give generously. If your gift is serving others, serve them well. If your gift is to encourage others, be encouraging. If you have a gift for showing kindness to others, do it gladly.

The body of Christ, composed of many members with varying gifts, can achieve unity only through genuine humility before God and before one another, which is a sign of transformed lives. The Upper Room meditation on August 18, titled "Humble Service," speaks of a gift humbly offered.

A few days a week I volunteer in our church library. I often see a certain man walking down the hall with a screwdriver or a drill or a sander in his hand.

When I ask him what he is doing he says, "Oh, I noticed that this needed to be done, and I thought I'd just come in and take care of it in my spare time." He doesn't receive any pay for these important little jobs, and most of the congregation has no idea that he works there so often during the week. But it is disciples like this man who keep every church building repaired and usable.

Some think that to be a disciple means witnessing to hundreds or preaching to crowds; many disciples do these things. But no less important is the disciple who cheerfully does the little things every day that make other people's lives more pleasant and productive. We all have some kind of talent that we can devote to further our Lord's kingdom. All we have to do is identify that skill or talent, decide to use it for the Lord – and then get up and actually do it.

We have many humble disciples in our church. I worked with them yesterday. I will work with them this afternoon. I work with them every day. May God bless you all for your humble service offered in Christ's name. Amen.

.