

“Not fearful, but faithful”

A sermon by the Rev. Frances Savill

Sunday September 6, 2020

Romans 13:8-14

This morning we are in the book of Romans.

The first 11 chapters of Romans lays out Paul’s message of grace; that salvation comes to us through the gift of Christ alone.

And so In light of that gospel, Paul calls his people to offer their bodies “as a living sacrifice” (12:1-2).

That’s from one of my favourite passages of scripture, where Paul says:

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 spiritual¹ worship. ² 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. (Romans 12:1-2 NRSV)

Or as Eugene Peterson translates it:

So here’s what I want you to do, God helping you: Take your everyday, ordinary life—your sleeping, eating, going-to-work, and walking-around life—and place it before God as an offering. (The Message)

The rest of chapters 12-13 of Romans begin to show the practical “how to” of sacrificial living. Paul’s community can begin to see what it means to “be transformed by the renewing of [their] minds” so as to “discern what is the will of God or what it looks like to present (them)selves as a living sacrifice.” (12:1-2).

It means thinking and acting in a way so the focus isn’t on ***pleasing ourselves***, but others (12: 3-8), and it means making one’s love for ***others*** genuine (12: 9-21).

In other words, this sacrifice is not accomplished independently, but in and through community.

Presenting ourselves as a living sacrifice happens in community.

If we are going to fulfill God’s commands, if we are going to present ourselves to God in response to all that God has done for us in Jesus our Lord, then ***we are called to do it in community*** - in our neighbourhoods, and in a special way, we learn to do it in our church, so that we might indeed transform the world, that we ourselves might be transformed, and that we would be ambassadors of Jesus in the world he loves.

Two weeks ago, we heard Peter confess that Jesus is the Christ, the Messiah, the Son of the Living God.

And this morning the Apostle Paul comes to us and says, if you want to live, live well, live wholly before God, living your confession, then do it in community, learning to love one another.

How many of you have been part of the church for a few years or so?

Have you ever seen any problems in a church?

Maybe not this church – but ever heard of problems in any other church?

Ever hear gossip, or wrangling?

Ever hear of bitterness, or quarrelling?

How much of it sounds like love for one another?

Some of it might.

Sometimes the loving thing to do is to speak difficult truth, but that truth still must be said in love.

We owe each other love, says Paul.

Paul has reminded his folks about the incredible gift we have all received in Jesus.

How many of you here this morning know that you are blessed by God?

How many of you know the love of God poured out to you?

And so our response is to love God deeply, and our expression of that is our love of neighbour.

God cares about how we are together.

God cares about giving us life – and the way that abundant life comes to us is through good community.

Most of us, know the church at some of its poorer moments –But we also know the church when it is at its best.

We know that Calvin church together makes a difference in the lives of people every day.

We bless our schools, and feed the hungry, we provide a safe place for people to meet.

Together we bless our community, care for one another, pray for one another, and build each other up.

At least we did all things before the pandemic.

Caring for each other, caring for our community, supporting our schools, our foodbank and the most vulnerable in our community and world today in the midst of COVID is a greater challenge.

It is easy enough to hide in your bubble, to not bother with others, to be fearful for the future and so stop being generous.

But we who have known God's love and faithfulness are called to be a living sacrifice – to live sacrificially in community, amongst a community.

Doing that – building up community – in this pandemic calls for sacrifice of time and energy- for creativity to do it safely in small groups in safe ways.
We don't build anything if people get sick.

But living in a good, healthy community, is abundant life.
Caring for others, and being cared for by others, is life-giving.
We still have to find ways to do this.

Showing up for worship – greeting each other matters.
Visiting safely, finding ways to show your care matters.

Giving generously – sacrificially – living each day finding ways to serve each other, and our community matters.

Together, with God's help, we seek new ways to be the community we long to be, where abundant life is experienced because we serve not ourselves but others.

Life comes to us through serving not ourselves but others – even in a pandemic.

We do this keeping in mind that the day of the Lord is near.

If you knew Jesus was returning next week, or next month, or in a year from now, what things would we be concerned about as Calvin Presbyterian Church?

What things are worth struggling for?

What things just aren't that important?

What things are key if Jesus' return is just around the corner?

Do you hear a sense of urgency in Paul's words?

“Besides this, you know what time it is, how it is now the moment for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we became believers; ¹² the night is far gone, the day is near. Let us then lay aside the works of darkness and put on the armor of light; ¹³ let us live honorably as in the day, not in reveling and drunkenness, not in

debauchery and licentiousness, not in quarreling and jealousy. ¹⁴ Instead, put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.” (NRSV)

I think Eugene Peterson captures Paul’s meaning well:

But make sure that you don’t get so absorbed and exhausted in taking care of all your day-by-day obligations that you lose track of the time and doze off, oblivious to God. The night is about over, dawn is about to break. Be up and awake to what God is doing! (The Message)

I entitled this message: “Not fearful but faithful.”

Our Lord’s return reminds us that we have work entrusted to us together – that hasn’t changed.

Have you seen the darkness of night, break with the dawn of a new day?

There is a long time of that pre-dawn glow, and you can tell the sun will be coming up soon...

Paul tells us that is where we are now.

The dark is nearly over = dawn is coming – and salvation is breaking in – and so we serve and care, and work together, loving deeply, practically, learning today the lessons of being Gods’ people in this new day.

We are not frantic or fearful about this day or the day of Jesus’ return, but our prayer is to be found faithful = which means serving together as His people.

Thanks be to God.

Lord, we confess that Jesus is Lord, Lord of our lives, Lord of the church, Lord overall, Lord of this day. He is our hope, and the hope of this world. Help us to live these words well. Lord, we live not frantically, or fearfully, but faithfully, learning to love one another- and learning how to care generously for each other and for those in need- show us how to do that today. Amen.