

Sermon
Sunday 27th September

Readings:

Romans 12:1-8

I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters,^[a] by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual^[a] worship. ² Do not be conformed to this world,^[a] 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.^[a]

³ 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 judgement, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned. ⁴ For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, ⁵ so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another. ⁶ We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us: prophecy, in proportion to faith; ⁷ ministry, in ministering; the teacher, in teaching; ⁸ the exhorter, in exhortation; the giver, in generosity; the leader, in diligence; the compassionate, in cheerfulness.

Luke 12:13-21 The Parable of the Rich Fool

¹³ Someone in the crowd said to him, 'Teacher, tell my brother to divide the family inheritance with me.' ¹⁴ But he said to him, 'Friend, who set me to be a judge or arbitrator over you?' ¹⁵ And he said to them, 'Take care! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; for one's life does not consist in the abundance of possessions.' ¹⁶ Then he told them a parable: 'The land of a rich man produced abundantly. ¹⁷ And he thought to himself, "What should I do, for I have no place to store my crops?"' ¹⁸ Then he said, "I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. ¹⁹ And I will say to my soul, Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry." ²⁰ But God said to him, "You fool! This very night your life is being demanded of you. And the things you have prepared, whose will they be?"' ²¹ So it is with those who store up treasures for themselves but are not rich towards God.'

Sermon:

I became a grandmother for the second time last weekend and the privilege of holding a newborn and saying Hello to him was just such a joyous moment. It reminded me how precious our children are, not just those related to us but those who are in our lives. The children we see at our family's service, before and after school when they come into the Link with their parents for our new Bell and Brew session, and all those we see at play. I had watched my daughter Sarah over the past 9 months declining some of her favourite foods, getting increasingly more tired, being sick for almost most of the pregnancy and then going through a painful delivery and losing a lot of blood. She has made many sacrifices during her pregnancy but is now blessed with such joy.

This sacrifice reminded me of another parent, quite an extraordinary parent, Abraham. You will probably recall that God had made a covenant with Abraham promising three things: land, descendants who would become a great nation, and a blessing for him and for all humanity. Abraham's faith was well and truly tested when God asked him to take his son Isaac up the mountain to sacrifice him and provide a burnt offering. Not only was Isaac his only son but he was especially precious because he was born to Abraham and Sarah when they were really quite elderly. Abraham demonstrated that he was prepared to give his most precious possession to God by taking Isaac up the mountain to be a burnt offering. Thankfully this was a test, and a ram was provided by God instead. What faith and dedication must Abraham have had.

The Old Testament speaks a lot about sacrifices of burnt offerings made at various Jewish acts of worship and at festivals. The first few chapters of Leviticus specify the type of animal, or sometimes grain, that was required according to its purpose. Sacrificial offerings were made in worship, to atone for sin or guilt or as a peace offering. I have often wondered how the poor managed to meet the expectations of the temple leaders. I have noted when watching TV programmes on farming how attached the farmers can become to their livestock. The livestock are also key to the financial viability of a farm and losing stock can break a farm business. I cannot imagine how hard it could be to provide your cherished goat as a sacrifice.

Against this backdrop I vividly remember the first time I encountered our post communion prayer – you can find it towards the end of our service book. This is probably the prayer I pray most fervently in all of our communion service, if I am honest

Almighty God, we thank you for feeding us with the body and blood of your Son Jesus Christ.

Through him we offer you our souls and bodies to be a living sacrifice.

Send us out in the power of your Spirit to live and work to your praise and glory.

Through him we offer you our souls and bodies to be a living sacrifice.

The concept of being a living sacrifice certainly appealed to me and the idea that it is me, personally, who is making the sacrifice did too. Not offering another life on my behalf. But I started to become curious about what this really meant. What is the

sacrifice that I should be making and how much is enough? What is too much? What is too little? We don't have a book like Leviticus that provides a levy of what is required.

I was relieved when I realised that this part of the prayer draws upon scripture and we can see that the concept of a living sacrifice comes from Paul's Letter to the Romans that we read today. Paul's letter to the Romans is probably the most influential book in Christian theology after the Gospels. In this chapter Paul is speaking about how we live as Christians and how, collectively, we are one body in Christ with each of us bringing our **different and varied** gifts and talents to serve and glorify the Lord. We have all been blessed in many different ways and, through God's promises and the ultimate sacrifice made for us on the cross, our salvation is the gift of God's grace that we receive by faith. Through the ultimate sacrifice made once and for many by our Lord Jesus Christ, our salvation is the gift of God's grace that we receive by faith.

We use a similar prayer at our 8am services where our liturgy is from the Book of Common Prayer. It is an older form and uses more old-fashioned English and the equivalent words are rather beautiful.

And here we offer and present unto thee, O Lord, ourselves, our souls and bodies, to be a reasonable, holy, and lively sacrifice unto thee;

Reasonable meaning considered and thoughtful and lively being living. The prayer continues:

humbly beseeching thee, that all we, who are partakers of this holy Communion, may be fulfilled with thy grace and heavenly benediction. And although we be unworthy, through our manifold sins, to offer unto thee any sacrifice, yet we beseech thee to accept this our bounden duty and service; not weighing our merits but pardoning our offences.

I like these words, but I still found myself puzzled by what sort of living sacrifice does one make, how do we know what the right thing is, how do we know how much is enough? Should I give all my time to God? If I did would I be spreading myself too thinly? We know from the parable recorded in Luke that it is unwise to store up too much for ourselves but God is not asking us to sell **all** our possessions and worldly goods. We are told that we are not a judge or arbitrator over one another, and we are simply advised not to store all our treasure up just for ourselves.

Paul gives us some more advice.

We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us.

Paul guides us 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.*

In short we need to reflect on the graciousness of God in bestowing various gifts to us and we need to pray and think about how we can use those gifts that we have been given to better glorify God and minister to his people especially in our parish. There are many things we can give. We can give of our time, we may have particular skills that we can offer in service of our worship in our parish, in serving others, in helping with our

buildings, and we can of course give money to help expand our ministry. We are instrumental in building the kingdom of heaven here on Earth, here in Haslemere.

Paul guides us further.

“Do not be conformed to this world,

or as I see it, do not be distracted by the trappings of this world,

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.”

Next week is our Harvest Festival and we shall be thanking God for the abundance of produce we are fortunate enough to enjoy in this country that we live in. Autumn brings the ripening of fruit and berries and that glorious late afternoon sunshine that gives an amazingly golden light to our fields and hedgerows. Nature is a wonderful thing and in amongst the leaves that are slowly changing their colour, if you look carefully, you can already see next year's buds forming in readiness for next spring. The promise of nature's future bounty is already in progress. You can also see an abundance of red berries and rosehips. I was particularly taken by the red berries of the cotoneaster in the hedge outside St Christopher's. Splashes of bright red, cascading along the branches, reminding us that Christ shed his blood for us. Reminding us of His ultimate sacrifice made for us and for our salvation. The most precious gift to us from God. How will we use our gifts and talents to honour and serve the Lord?

Lord let us pray using some of the words of Paul's letter:

Lord, help us not think more highly of ourselves than we ought.

Help us to think with sober judgement.

Help us to use the different gifts that have been given to us wisely.

In the name of your Son, Jesus Christ,

Amen