

“One Body, Many Members”

Romans 12: 1-8

I will tell you at one point this week, I considered just reading the Scripture and sitting down for our sermon this morning. It seems so simple. It seems so easy. It seems so self-explanatory. Sure, it might look like a bunch of statements that Paul put together but at the heart of the matter, this is the Gospel message for us as people of faith. It should be so easy for us to follow. It should be so easy for us to live out Paul's words in our lives but as I look around our world today and I hear the things that are happening, I am beginning to wonder. Why can't we live together as one Body with many members? Why do we need division? Why does it seem like we as humanity would prefer to claim our differences rather than seeing our similarities? Why does it seem like we just don't understand with it means to live fully in God's grace?

As I have lived with this text this past week, I am not sure I am any closer to answering these questions. However, one thing did become obvious to me. We as people of faith are not really comfortable with God's grace. Don't get me wrong. We are okay with God's grace being shown to us as individuals but when it comes

to God's grace being shown to others, that's when our understanding gets a little shaky.

Let me explain: When I looked at the Book of Romans as a whole, I realized that it took Paul eleven chapters just to explain what exactly is God's grace and only four for him to explain how we are to live it out in our lives. Eleven Chapters explaining God's grace. No, I don't think the Roman Church was full of stupid people. I just think we as people of faith don't understand God's grace. And let's face it, the Roman Church was not alone. There are sixty six books in the Bible that talk about God's grace and we have had them for thousands of years and we still don't get it. We just can't wrap our minds around the concept that God would love us unconditionally, that God would shower us with grace and not expect something in return. Sure, we might get it a little bit as individuals but, it completely boggles our mind that God would do this for us as a whole group.

Why can't we realize that God isn't going to play favorites? Why can't we realize that God loves us all so much that God continues to show all of us God's unmerited favor?

Okay, I'm hopping down from my soap box right now. Maybe I was too quick to realize that this text doesn't need a sermon to go along with it or maybe I am just preaching to the choir.

Maybe we, the ones who are sitting in the pews, get it. We wouldn't be sitting here otherwise if we didn't understand God's grace just a little bit. But I wonder if the world was looking at us, would it understand and experience God's grace through us and around us?

When I asked myself this question this past week, I came to realization that is exactly what Paul is asking the Christians in Rome as well. If people looked at us, interacted with us, would they gain a better understanding of God's grace and how it works in bringing us together as the Body of Christ?

In our text today, Paul uses the language of "living sacrifice" to get this point across but I fully admit I am not comfortable with this type of language. When I think of sacrifice, I tend to focus more on the negative connotations. We tell people that we need to do sacrificial giving. We tell people that there is sacrificial love. We tell people that we should make sacrifices for others. That all seems to be negative to me and really goes against the nature of God's grace.

Immediately when Paul talks about "living sacrifice", my mind goes to the idea that I am supposed to give something up to prove that I love God, something important, something that means a whole lot to me, something that would hurt for me to lose. Once again, this goes against what I know and what I have experienced about my God. My God is loving and gracious and certainly doesn't expect for me to hurt just so that I can prove that I want to be in a relationship with my God.

So what do we do with this idea of “sacrifice”? It wasn’t until a commentator reminded me that the word sacrifice has its roots in the idea of making something sacred, making something holy that I began to grasp what Paul was actually saying in this text. By using the language of “sacrifice” Paul was trying to reclaim the idea that there is something sacred about our relationship with God and that we are called to honor it in every way. He was reclaiming the idea that by offering something up to God, it would be made sacred, it would be made holy, that it would stand as a testimony to our experience of God’s grace and love.

Paul isn’t asking us to give up something in order to gain God’s grace. Paul is inviting us to realize that by claiming God’s grace in our lives, we receive so much more than we could ever imagine. We don’t lose anything by offering ourselves up to God as a testimony. We don’t lose anything by offering our lives, our very being as a way to show how God’s love and grace has transformed us into the person God created us to be.

We don’t lose anything by becoming “living offerings” to our God. Okay, well that’s not exactly true. We do lose some things but I think in all honesty, we are okay with losing these things. We lose the labels society places on us. We lose the preference to hold onto our differences. We lose the baggage that comes along with trying to live up to other people’s expectations. We lose all that stuff that is not of God and I’ll be honest, I’m okay with losing that stuff. I’m okay with losing

it because that stuff is of this world and has no place in the Kingdom of God.

Really, all that stuff, like holding on to our differences, like labeling everyone we meet, like trying to live up to everyone's expectations, all that stuff has no place in the Body of Christ. All that stuff really does is prevent us from coming together and experiencing God's grace as a whole, prevents from becoming one in the Spirit.

What Paul is inviting the people of faith back then and the people of faith now to realize is that one of the most powerful ways we can transform this world is by lifting ourselves up as offerings, as testimonies to the ever present, life-giving, life-changing nature of the love and grace of God. Paul is inviting us to realize that we as people who have been made sacred, as people who have been made holy through the love and grace of God, we have the power to transform the world and help bring about God's Kingdom on earth. Paul is inviting us to realize that by offering up our every day ordinary lives as gifts to God, as examples of the way God works in this world, we have the power to put aside our differences and come together as the Body of Christ, here on earth. We have the power to be made whole simply because by celebrating and sharing all that God has done for us, everyone, everyone will know and experience God's grace and God's love through our actions, through our words, through our interactions with others. We have the power to bring healing and wholeness to all of God's creation.

By simply becoming “living testimonies” to our God. That’s how we have the power to transform our world. We simply tell about the amazing things God has done in our lives. We simply show how God’s amazing love works. We simply allow God’s grace to be the standard that guides all our actions and forms all of our words. We simply allow God’s grace to be what guides us and leads us in our everyday living.

Now before we all start thinking that this is too hard for us to do, that it would require a saint to complete this task, that surely God is calling the Mother Teresas and the Martin Luther Kings to be the ones to become living testimonies, not us ordinary people, let me just say, God is. God is calling all of us to become living testimonies to God’s grace and God’s love and God has given us everything we need to do it. We all know someone who we would say showed us how to be living testimonies to God’s grace and God’s love. Maybe it was a singular person. Maybe it was a whole group of people. But we all know someone who was and maybe still is a living testimony to God’s love and grace for us. For me, I can think of numerous people, but one stands out in particular. We all knew her as Grandma Reaves. She had such joy, such happiness. Nothing seemed to bring her down. And we all knew she loved us. She showed us in so many ways but the best way was that at the age of 70, she was still counseling high school camp. She is now 95 and her health is failing but her life, her words, and her actions showed me and

countless other young people how God's grace works in our lives. This is just one for me. I know that there are others.

But it is just not me who has people who touched my life, who showed what it means to have God's grace as my guide. We all know someone. And so, I want to do a little congregational participation. I want you to turn to the person next to you and share. Who was that person for you?

I invite you to come back to the larger group. We all have our stories. We all have our examples. Now is the time to share. We can be that example for someone else. Now is the time to become a living testimony to God's grace and love for all of God's creation.

You see, that's where the Community of faith comes in. God has given us gifts and God expects us to use them, not for our own sake's but for each other's sake. I need you just as much as you need me for the simple fact: God didn't create us to be on our own. God created us to be in community with one another.

Sure, I'll fully admit that not all of us can be like Mother Teresa. That not all of us can be like Martin Luther King. That is a given. But what we can do is offer our gifts up to the service of the Lord and do them to the best of our ability.

Take a look at Paul's list of gifts. He just named a few. There are certainly a lot more of them but what I love about them is that none of these gifts can stand

alone. Each gift requires a relationship for the gift to be used in, for the gift to be use for as people of faith. It is almost like God planned it from the beginning and knew what God was doing when God called us into being. Funny how that happens?

As people of faith, we have the power to transform our world simply by offering everything we do up to the glory of God, by being in real, authentic relationship with one another, and by using our gifts to bring the Body of Christ together, so that all will know and experience God's grace and love. As people of faith. We have nothing to lose, and the Kingdom of God to gain just by doing this. So maybe it is time I stopped preaching to the choir and we take our life-giving message out into our community.

No I'm not asking you to go and knock on doors. No I'm not asking you to go and stand on the street, holding up signs that say the End is near. All I am asking is that we find the strength, we find the courage, we find the passion, we find the excitement to live our lives as testimonies to how God's grace, to how God's love has set us free.

And we don't have to be a saint to do that. We simply need to allow God's grace to be our standard in all our actions, in our words, in all our interactions with others. We simply need to be the Body of Christ here on earth. We simply need to become the people God called us to be and created us to be, a people of love, a

people of joy, a people of hope, and a people of grace. Maybe if we strived to do this, the world would know what a gift it is to be part of the Body of Christ here on earth.

So as we live today, may always we offer ourselves as Living Testimonies to the glory of our God so that world will know of God's grace and so that we will all be made as one. Amen.