

Sermon 10-05-2025
 Transformed by Christ – Rev. Markus Wegenast
 Romans 12:1-2

*¹I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, on the basis of God's mercy, to present your **bodies** as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your reasonable act of worship. ²Do not be conformed to this age, but be transformed by the **renewing of the mind**, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect.^[a]*

1)

A middle aged man walks up to the microphone that stood in front of a huge group of people. It was the summer of 2010 – roughly. He had planned for this moment for many weeks, he was nervous, but he was also excited to finally present his case to a room filled with almost 1000 delegates. His day job had him used to give talks in front of people, but this was different. This was not about his job, this was about his passion. The talk he planned to deliver was not about business ideas or customer satisfaction; this talk was about something much more important to him: it was about the church.

I met Ken early on in my ministry in Wisconsin. Ken had a huge passion for young adult ministry. Even though he worked a pretty demanding job in the corporate world, his true energy and every free minute of his life he poured into being a husband, father, and member of his local Methodist church. He has always had a heart for young adult ministry. When I started serving my first church close to where he worshiped it wouldn't take long for him to reach out to me and recruit me to help out in his many young adult ministry initiatives.

Ken had many frustrations about the church. He was his small rural church's lay member to annual conference and for many years Ken had witnessed how our Methodist Conference in Wisconsin lost its grip on providing for vital young adult ministry.

That's what brought him to the microphone that one summer in the year 2010-ish. He addressed the plenary of the Wisconsin conference of the UMC. He made a passionate speech to the assembly to vote in favor of a new budget line item that would create the office of a young adult coordinator for the conference – a line item he created.

I could see a lot of skeptical faces in the room that day – and maybe Ken could see them too. Maybe that was the reason why his talk became more and more passionate until it ended in a final plea: "I beg you," he said, "I beg you, members of the WCUMC – vote yes for this resolution!"

I'm going to tell you in a bit how the plenary voted back then – for right now I want to tell you why I'm telling you about Ken's passionate talk.

When I read today's scripture passage as I prepared for this sermon I couldn't help but think of Ken and his passion for God's church. 1975 years before Ken appealed so passionately to the WUMC, the Apostle Paul passionately appealed to the local church of the city of Rome:

I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, on the basis of God's mercy, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God... – Romans 12:1

I don't know how Paul's words were received in Rome. Paul had never personally met the people there, he was about to visit them, but they only knew of him through hearsay. They knew he was an apostle in Christ's church, but they had just never seen him in person. I don't know how they felt when Paul appealed to them.

What's it like for you when someone appeals to you? How does it make you feel when someone passionately urges you to do something?

That can be uncomfortable, can't it? We don't know how the people of Rome felt when they heard someone they never met appeal to them. It's not all that important. What's important is the question of whether Paul's appeal reaches you.

Because guess what: Paul wrote Romans not just for the people of Rome, he also wrote it to you. Through Paul it is God's appeal for you to decide if you let these words affect you...

2)

So what's it like to hear Paul appeal to you to present your bodies as a living sacrifice?

A living sacrifice, what's that anyway?

Let's try to figure this out by asking the opposite: What is the opposite of a living sacrifice?

A dead sacrifice, right?

We may not be so familiar with dead sacrifices anymore but the people in Paul's time were. The Mediterranean world had tons of dead sacrifices that people made at their temples. Whether they were Jews, Greeks, Romans or other religious believers, they all had their temples to present dead sacrifices of animals, grains and sometimes other items (some even people!) to appeal to their gods.

I'm not making fun of the old Jewish sacrificial system, after all it was instituted by God to them early on in the Old Testament. But when Jesus came he became the final sacrifice and did away with all the regulations of sacrificing dead animals. Christ gave his life so we could have life, new life, life that doesn't rest on the continuous slaughtering of animals to atone for our sins. It is his deed on the cross that offers us atonement.

Paul is appealing to us to live in this new reality by becoming living sacrifices ourselves. It's interesting to hear Paul say that we should present our *bodies* as living sacrifices. Why our bodies?

Why does Paul appeal to us to present our *BODIES* as living sacrifices?

Why not our hearts, or our minds, or our soul – why our bodies?

What we have here is the important connection between body and soul. If you take a look at your bulletin you will see that I have underlined two expressions in today's Bible text where you see that in the next verse Paul makes this connection even more explicit by stating that when we present our bodies as living sacrifices to the Lord it also relates to the renewing of our minds.

Both body and soul/mind belong together!

Our bodies matter just as much as our soul – our inner being, our mind matters to God. We live in pretty polarized times these days. There are some religious trends in new age religions but even in sections within Christianity that overemphasize the spirit and the soul and say the body doesn't matter. And then, of course, there is the opposite trend to only focus on our body in terms of our physical health, and we neglect that we also have a soul that needs care. Isn't it interesting that the Apostle Paul in the year 56-ish already points out that both belong together?

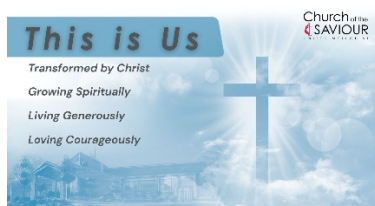
Body and mind, mind and body, they belong together; it's the way God created us and we are appealed to present ourselves that way, because this is who we truly are. Is it fair to say:

“This is us!”?

Oh wait a minute, isn't that the theme for our October stewardship message series?! Huh, what a “coincidence!”

3)

This month I invite you to reflect a little bit about who we are as people and as a church family. Who are we as Church of the Saviour?



This is the vision statement of our church and each Sunday we will explore one of them. This is who we are, or I should rather say: this is who we aspire to be for a vision is not a complete reality yet – it is something we envision together to be.

We are a group of wonderfully gifted people, loved by God, invited by Christ to learn and serve and grow. We are invited to present our bodies as living sacrifices. None of us are perfect – we all have our issues and brokenness that we carry with us – and yet: God thinks so highly of us not because we are perfect but because he perfectly loves us.

So don't feel bad when you look at our vision statement and think: O, I don't know if this is me. Trust God that with his shepherding help and love this is what he invites you to be.

Today's Bible text from Romans focuses on our first vision about being transformed by Christ. When we present our bodies as living sacrifices we are on the way to be transformed:

Do not be *conformed* to this age, but be *transformed* by the renewing of the mind, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect. - Romans 12:2

Do you feel that is an expectation too high for you? Do you feel that Paul is appealing a bit too much for your likes? What does it look like for you to be transformed by Christ? Does it appeal to you?

It can be counter cultural to live transformed by Christ because when God takes a hold of you something essential within you changes: You turn from a me-person to a others-person. This is a tough sell in our day and age because we are culturally so trained to make personal satisfaction and instant gratification our goal.

But when we live transformed by Christ's sacrificial death, when we are willing to make sacrifices for each other too and live the way of Christ, then we live up to what God had in mind for all of us when he created people. There will always be challenges to this – we'll always be tempted to think our lives are confined to live non-transformed and that this whole "presenting our bodies as a living sacrifice" is just something for really religious people. We sell ourselves short then from the calling that God has for us in Christ.

I think it's time to illustrate that with the chicken eagle story. Have I told you the chicken eagle story before? I'll do it now:



Once upon a time, a man found the egg of an eagle. It had been abandoned for some reason by its mother, but as it was still warm, the man took it, and put it in the nest of one of his backyard chickens along with the other eggs, that were there being brooded upon.

After a period of time, the eaglet was hatched, and along with the other chicks from his nest began to go about the backyard, doing what the other chicks did. He scratched the earth for worms and insects. He looked for the corn that the man would throw into the yard. He clucked and cackled as best as he could, and as he grew, he would, like other chickens, trash his wings, and fly a few feet in the air.

Years passed in this way, and the eagle grew very old. One day he saw a magnificent bird, far above him in the cloudless sky. It glided majestically among the powerful wind currents, soaring, swooping, scarcely beating its long golden wings.

The old eagle looked at it in awe and asked, "What is that?" "That is the Eagle, the king of birds," said one of his neighbors. He belongs to the sky into the high places. We belong to the Earth, we are chickens."

The old eagle knew this was true, and so it was he lived and died as a chicken, for that is what he believed he was.

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Do you believe in Christ? Do you believe that Christ indeed calls you to live transformed by his grace? Can I appeal to you to believe that and to live it out?

4)

My friend Ken appealed to the WCUMC. His appeal was not followed. A slight majority voted his appeal to add a conference coordinator for young adult ministries down.

He was disappointed, very disappointed. But he wouldn't quit his appeals. That to me is such a powerful testimony for a transformed life – when you don't quit just because things don't go the way you appeal for them.

God does not quit on you – maybe this month you feel *you* are not ready to follow the appeal that God has for you to live up to his vision for your life. But rest assured – as long as you have faith in your heart, God will not stop appealing – and when you follow you will soar. Amen.