

TEXT: Romans 12:1-5

THEME: THEREFORE...PRESENT YOUR BODIES AS LIVING SACRIFICES

1. Therefore Do Not Think of Yourself More Highly than You Ought!
2. Therefore Appreciate the Place God Has for You

Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will. For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you. Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others” (Romans 12:1-5).

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

This is Labor Day weekend. If the holiday lives up to its name, people are thinking about their labor. That may be especially true in these difficult economic times. If the holiday lives up to its name, people are reflecting on the benefits they receive from their labor—benefits such as income and fulfillment. Some people might think they have reason to pat themselves on the back. Perhaps they can point to a lot of earthly things that their labor has given them. They might be inclined to echo the sentiments of the Pharisees of Bible times: “Thank you, God, that I am so smart, so talented, so gifted...that I still have a job while others do not.”

When the apostle Paul wrote to the Romans in our text, he said, “**Therefore, ...in view of God's mercy.**” In view of God's mercy, the children of God will have a different attitude about the benefits their labor or jobs have reaped for them. First, Paul writes, “**Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought.**” Rather than boast about what we have been able to accomplish, let us remember that if God hadn't given us jobs or the physical and mental ability to do our jobs, we would have accomplished nothing.

Paul continues, “**Rather think of yourself with sober judgment.**” Reflecting back on their lives and careers, many adults recognize that the hand of God has been active throughout their lives. They acknowledge that God led them to make decisions to take jobs or to turn them down. With an attitude of humility, we are able to see the hand of God in our lives.

This Labor Day may we not think too highly of ourselves but in humility thank God for the blessings he gives us through our work.

On Labor Day, Christians also acknowledge that someone else, obviously Jesus, labored in order to give us our most precious blessing—our forgiveness. If we had to earn or labor to pay for our sins, we would have no hope whatsoever. Through Christ's work forgiveness of sins and eternal life are ours. May we never think too highly of ourselves but in humility thank God for the blessings he gives us through Christ's work.

And while we're thanking God, let's be sure to thank him for the place he has for each one of us in his kingdom. You know, the day after Labor Day was once considered the start of the new school year. Michigan has mandated that for our public schools. Our Lutheran elementary school and most private schools have already started. But whether it is public or private, it is safe to say that on this coming Tuesday, millions of young people will be back in the classroom—in earnest.

In the classroom, students tend to compare themselves with others. Someone in the room is smarter than I am; someone is prettier; someone is more athletic—and the comparisons never end. As we look at the gifts of others, we may be inclined to feel inferior, to think that our gifts are of little value, to think that we are unimportant.

Unfortunately, those thoughts can carry over into the church and the way we view our service to God. If we don't have the most gifts and the greatest talents, we think we aren't important to the kingdom of God.

Is this the way God would have us think? Remember the key word that introduced our Scripture reading, our sermon text, today—“**Therefore, ...in view of God's mercy.**”

Therefore points back to the special grace God poured out on us. We were so important to God the Father that he gave us Jesus. Jesus considered us so important that he was willing to die for us. The Holy Spirit thought us so important that he worked faith within us.

With that in mind, Paul urges us to remember that we all occupy a special place in the kingdom of God. To illustrate, Paul has us look at our bodies. Certainly we consider some members of our bodies to be more important than others—at least they seem to be more important. But as soon as “unimportant” parts of our bodies fail us, we quickly realize how wrong we were. Even a torn fingernail can be extremely uncomfortable. I just read that the appendix, long thought to be a “vestigial” organ, left over from our supposed evolutionary days and only a nuisance to us now, has been found to play an important role in maintaining the good bacteria in our bodies. Evidently, contrary to what modern medicine has taught for decades, God knew what he was doing when he created us with an appendix.

In Christ's kingdom all the gifts and talents God has given us are important. Our congregation is grateful for all the gifts used in service to God, regardless of how “important” one person's gifts may seem in comparison to others. If you are our appendix, we don't want to lose you!

In Christ all who have come to faith belong to one another. We have a common faith, trust, and hope that binds us all together. And we have a common goal to glorify God for the blessing of forgiveness, salvation, eternal life, and an abundant earthly life he has poured out on us. Next week on Listening Sunday, let's all plan how we can use all the gifts he has given us here at Trinity to God's glory and for the good of his people here in Bay City and throughout the world. Amen.

Prayer of the Church—Labor Day

Lord God, our Father and Creator,
we deserve

to labor among the thorns and thistles,
to eat by the sweat of our brow,
to work without reward,

for we confess

we have spoiled your creation by our sin,
we have marred your work by our neglect,
we have hurt your work by our rebellion.

We pray you bless our labor

by Jesus who was once a carpenter,
by Jesus who came to be our servant,
by Jesus who saved us to serve.

For his sake keep us and all who labor

from false dealing and unfair practice,
from excessive profit and unjust gain,
from slovenly service and irrational demands.

Help us to labor with love, joy, and faithfulness.

Teach us that the best labor we give you is loving service to our fellowmen.

In Christ's name we ask it, who taught us to pray:

THE LORD'S PRAYER