

## Romans 11:33-12:8

I attempted to do my every verse breakdown on our Roman's passage today for our fourth Sunday of the month. But after writing over an entire page on the first section of verses, I thought I would honor the last verse of the reading and do an "act of mercy" to you with "cheerfulness." Your welcome.

So what can we say about this reading with so much happening in it? This reading flows out of Paul's teaching on predestination and so it begins with him simply saying, "If we can't figure God and His Ways out, why should that surprise us?" He's God, we aren't. He's a bit bigger than us. He's the Three in One, the Infinite, the One outside time and space whom the archangels hide their faces from. And we are, well, just us. And since that is who He is, and this is who we are, let us live as he would have us – as living sacrifices. Recognizing he has given us Himself, his very life on the cross, for our salvation. He died and lives for us, let us live and die for Him and in Him.

Yes, we cannot read our passage from the middle of Romans having forgotten the beginning. Paul has already told the Church in Rome and us the law: how we fall short and deserve death. He has already told us the Gospel that Jesus took the death we deserved that we might have his life. He has already told us how that salvation

and life is free and promised through faith, which is given through baptism and the Word of God which has come to us. So let us rejoice in it. And walk in it.

But what does that look like “to walk in it”?

Well, in comes Romans 12. “I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship (a better translation – reasonable liturgy!) Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.”

That is what it looks like to walk in the mercies of God! It is, first, to recall the mercies of God – his work for you: to make you, to call you to the faith, to die and rise for you! And then to walk in the mercies of God, is for us to share that mercy in sacrificial living. Sounds easy enough? Right? But think about the word “sacrifice,” is it a “fun” word? It is a word of pain, substitution, and death. We are asked then to die to ourselves each day that we might live for those around us. Doing dishes isn’t fun, but its sacrificial to do them anyway. To apologize is even less fun, to say you were wrong – not fun. But they are sacrifices of love. So in your vocations, your callings as parent, worker, friend, spouse, neighbor, how can you sacrifice yourself for others?

And isn't this so opposed to what we hear in the world? "Cut that person out of your life, you don't need them." "What's in it for me?" Those are our natural inclinations. But, remember the mercies of God, the One who took an undeserved punishment for undeserving people like you and me. That is who we follow! It doesn't mean we have to be pushovers, but it does mean we ought not paralyze our mercy.

Mercy that, as Paul continues, goes on to look towards and discern what is good and right. This is the renewing of our minds. Let us fill our eyes and minds with things that are good, not evil, so that when we need grasp onto something that which is good will be close at hand.

When you are falling you reach out for anything, a helping hand, a shelf, a chair to try and steady yourself. But what if the only things around you are unstable? They come down with you, on top of you. So let us surround ourselves with goodness, things built securely on the rock of Christ. So when we are falling in life we can reach out and find hope, forgiveness, meaning, and life.

Or think of it this way: Why are victims of addiction and abuse so likely to wind up as addicts and abusers? Shouldn't they, of all people, know the horror, the pain it causes? And, praise God, some break out of the cycle, but why do so many not? Because evil begets evil, sin begets sin, and when that is all you know when it is all

around you – why wouldn't you do the same? There are little girls out there who have never known a male role model who wasn't abusive, crass, or selfish. So when they meet a man who is selfish, abusive, and crass why wouldn't they date them? "That's what all men are like, right?" Let us fight for what is good and right. Let us fill our homes and minds with them.

I cannot emphasize enough how the things we consume in our homes, on our screens, in the classrooms, with the friends, how those impact us. They influence us. They conform us to the ways of the world. How is an hour a week here going to compare? The goodness of God and His word needs to be present in our lives, this is how our minds are transformed and renewed to the goodness and hope of God.

Does this mean you can't watch the R rated movie? No. Though if a particular concept leads you towards sin, maybe we should censor ourselves a bit more. But how about this? For every piece of media we consume that is violent, or lustful, or crass, how about we then take some time to counteract such things with the goodness of God's word or in the celebration of wholesome sacrificial love? For every hour of toxic news and political dialogue lets read one verse of the fruit of the Spirit? For every time we overreact and scream at our loved ones, we say one silent prayer? I dare you, and Paul today "appeals to you by the mercies of God," to try it – and see the renewal of your mind when the Word of God is present and takes root. So that when we consume the media of this life we are on a firm

foundation and not swayed so greatly by what we see, but can consume it recognizing what is good in it, and what isn't.

Paul adds a few other thoughts to what it looks like to walk in the mercy of God:

“For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned. For as in one body we have many members...”

“Why should I be the one who sacrifices?” “I can do this because of these reasons, but when they do it it's different.” We are so quick to self-justify, so quick to accuse others or those we don't like. If Peyton Manning threw an interception for my Colts, you know what I'd say? “Ah! No! The ball was tipped, or the receiver bobbled it, you'll get 'em next time.” When Tom Brady on the Patriots threw an interception? “Yes, ha! That guy is so terrible!” What was the difference? I rooted for one and not the other. We do this all the time in our own lives, especially when it comes to ourselves. We give every justification for our actions but when someone else does the same thing – we attack. Let us repent and fight against this urge. To die to yourself and be a living sacrifice is to be self-aware, to empathize, to listen to the other side of the argument, to try and find olive branches and be a peacemaker. CS Lewis, the great Christian thinker, wrote, “[The humble person] will not be thinking about humility: he will not be thinking about himself at all. If

anyone would like to acquire humility, I can, I think, tell him the first step. The first step is to realize that one is proud. And a biggish step, too. At least, nothing whatever can be done before it. If you think you are not conceited, it means you are very conceited indeed.”

And so we confess we are poor miserable sinners, it ought not be just lip service, lets act like it. Not to be permanently depressed, but to be mindful of others in our same state and to empathize with them, because, as Paul continues: we aren't in this alone! We are members of the Body of Christ and we have different strengths, struggles, gifts, and weaknesses. Let's not attack, lets build up, and point them to where our forgiveness is found, in the first chapters of Romans, in Jesus and His sacrifice for us on the cross.

Maybe I still bit off more than I could chew for one sermon. Let's review. There is a God, and it isn't us, so let us not think of ourselves too highly. But this God has shown us sacrificial love in giving us his Son, Jesus, to die and rise that we might have life. Let us walk in that sacrificial love where the Lord has placed us, by dying to ourselves for others, by surrounding ourselves with what is good and right, and by working for the good of the body of Christ.

How's that for a laundry list? But, as are all God's laws, they are for our good – that there might be joy, forgiveness, and strengthened faith which leads to life. And

as we fall short, let us once more recall how this all started, with the love of God in creation, and even more, in redemption as he gave himself for us. God be forever praised. Amen.