

**Holy Trinity Lutheran Church
Des Moines, WA
September 21, 2014**

Romans 12: 1-8

How Do You React?

- 1. How would you react?**
- 2. Look back at Romans**
- 3. In View of God's Mercy**

Hymns: As The Deer – 452 – 465 – 484

Closing: 566

All Scripture quotations from NIV 1984

The young man's life has been ripped apart by addiction. He spends every day searching for a way to satisfy his desires, and the selfishness of his actions has destroyed his most important relationships. He has exhausted every plan to find help on his own. And now he is left in a hopeless situation, begging for help, with a bleak future in front of him.

Then one day, the situation changes. A stranger comes with an answer. He would forget the mistakes of this young man's past. He would provide a solution to his problem of addiction. He would put in the work until the broken relationships were repaired. And then he would continue to be a part of this young man's life, supplying for his needs; giving encouragement to fight the demons and the battles; picking the young man up whenever and as often as he slipped back to those self-seeking addictions. No matter what, this helper would never leave, he would never give up.

How would you react if you were shown such kindness? Would you shrug your shoulders and pass on the offer? Would you begrudgingly accept the help and apathetically go through the prescribed plan? Or would you overflow with thanks and gratitude? Would you search endlessly for a way to show your appreciation? Would you live and work with fervor because of all that you were given?

How would you react?

Or perhaps I should ask, "How do you react?" Because that story of addiction and rescue is your story. It is my story. The Bible makes it clear that when we are born into this world, our lives are controlled by the selfish sinful nature and we are held captive by our sinful desires. Our addiction to sin damages every relationship that we have in this world

as we seek to satisfy self, and it rips apart the relationship that we are supposed to have with the God who created us and gave us life. All of our own attempts to dig out of this hole of hell fail miserably and we are left with one option, begging for help without any kind of real hope.

But in the bleak pit of addiction, we were given help, we were given hope. God came to us with a solution, a life changing - an eternity changing - solution. He sent his Son with the answer. He forgave our past by his perfect life and death; he drowned our selfish sinful nature in the waters of baptism; he reconciled our relationship with the Father by his atoning work. And he continues to supply our needs, continues to empower us to battle our addiction, and none of that undeserved love will ever stop. So, how do you react? How do you possibly react to the grace of God that does so much for hopeless sinners?

That is the exact subject of Paul's words to us today in Romans, and these will be the final words from Paul that we will focus on.

As Paul seeks to answer our question, he begins with an important word, "**Therefore.**" With that opening, Paul is connecting with the words he has previously written to us. And that is important because he continues by writing, "**I urge you.**" What Paul is about to tell us to do in this urging will only be possible if we remember all that he has said before it. Without that word, we would balk at what Paul is about to say; we would reject what seems to be an impossible command. We would do that because a part of us does not like to be urged, does not like to be pushed, does not like to be commanded. But Paul gives the urging with this context: "**Therefore, I urge you, in view of God's mercy.**"

For the past three months on our Sunday mornings, we have been walking through Paul's letter to the Romans, and we have been viewing that mercy. Through that time, we have seen so much of what God brings into our lives. We have seen how he has done everything that we needed him to do. We have seen how he changed our lives, how he restored our relationship with him, how he helps us battle sin. We have seen it all, that is, the beauty of Romans.

So, Paul knows that we will be looking for a proper way to react to this mercy. In much the same way that Paul says in 2 Corinthians that "Christ's love compels us" (2 Cor. 5:14), Paul knows that after hearing about all that God has done for us, we will be looking for ways to respond. So, he gives this urging to people who he knows will take it as encouragement not burdensome law.

How might we properly react? Paul urges, "**Offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship. ² 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.”

Paul says that the first way to properly respond to God's mercy is for each one of us to live as sacrifices. Our life can serve as an offering of thanks to God. That begins with non-conformity to the rest of this world. As we said, this world is stuck in an addiction to self. The world is self-seeking, it is self-promoting, self-righteous, self-centered. Paul urges us to rebel against that attitude, and live sacrificially. Live sacrificially for God, live sacrificially for others. Use your life, the life that you have been graciously given, to give to others.

And Paul says to do that requires a transformation. The Greek word that Paul uses here in urging us in our lives of sacrifice gives us our English word “metamorphosis.” In the same way that a caterpillar goes through this changing process and becomes something very new and beautiful, Paul says that our connection to the Word of God has transformed us. It has taken minds stuck on self and renewed them.

What does that renewal mean? When God made Adam and Eve, he gave them minds and wills that were in line with God's will. What God wanted for mankind, man wanted for mankind. What God wanted for the world, man wanted for the world. But that was wrecked by sin. Now Paul says that through this transformation, we will again have in mind the will of God as we live our lives, and everything that flows out of a life lived according to God's will is a holy and pleasing sacrifice.

As Paul writes about personal sacrifice, he then continues by giving a familiar lesson of what that will look like in the church. Again, in view of God's grace, Paul writes, **“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. ⁴ Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, ⁵ so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. If a man's gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith. ⁷ If it is serving, let him serve; if it is teaching, let him teach; ⁸ if it is encouraging, let him encourage; if it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously; if it is leadership, let him govern diligently; if it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully.” ¹**

As we live in the church as one, our every action will begin with humility. When we lack humility, we tend to forget the ugly place that each of us came

from. When we forget our past, we lose our compassion for other's mistakes and shortcomings. We become judgmental, intolerant in a bad way, inhospitable. Instead, filled with humility, we will remember that whatever gifts and blessings that we have come from God and it is the same for every person who is a fellow member of his church. Whatever our part, God gave us that role so that we might benefit all the other people in the church body.

As we live, we will not just look for opportunities to use our gifts in the Church, but we will also seek to encourage and enable others to use their gifts as they respond to God's mercy. And the ways to live for the church are numerous. And Paul's urging is that we do whatever we've been gifted to do and allow others to do the same, understanding that living sacrifices will look very different.

As we conclude our look at Romans, we have seen it all. We have seen all that God has done for us in his love, we've explored it in detail through the apostle Paul's pen. So, how will you react? In view of God's mercy, our response will in one way be the same. We will each live as a sacrifice to our God. Yet, as we live in the Church as one, those sacrifices will look very different and produce different results. As we live in view of God's mercy, may we strive to be those sacrifices that God has transformed us to be, and may we celebrate the Church that we come together to make. Amen.

¹ *The Holy Bible: New International Version*. 1984 (Ro 12:6–8). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.