

Evotional

Sermon title: "Our values."

Bible passages: Romans 12:1-2.

Speaker: Neil Durling.

Date: 18.1.15.

Message:

The Old Testament sacrificial system: Ritual slaughters were carried out by the Priests (the best butchers in Israel); a number of them lifted the sacrifice onto the huge altar. The sacrifice was often cooked and then eaten by the giver, with the choice parts given to the Priests to eat and some burnt as an aroma to God – the meal literally got up God's nose! It was a meal of peace eaten together, not the barbaric idea of sacrifice that some of us imagine. The offerings were called guilt or peace offerings. They were a reminder that God removed guilt and brought peace because he loved his people.

Offerings happened in various places, and then in the Temple in Jerusalem when it was built. People would bring a sheep or bull (poorer folk could bring doves, grain or incense). On the Day of Atonement they would offer a perfect yearling lamb (or doves). All of this ended in AD 70 with the destruction of the Temple and has now been replaced by gifts of charity.

Leviticus gives details about offerings, and continually reminded folk that sacrifices must have "proper value".

Jesus became our sacrifice: His death on the cross ended the sacrificial system. Jesus was the sacrifice with ultimate "proper value". In Romans Paul is encouraging his hearers to look at what God has accomplished for them through Jesus. There was an argument between Jewish and Gentile Christians – The Jews prided themselves on having had and given up the sacrificial system, whereas the Gentiles were proud to have never needed it! Paul tells them to lay these silly arguments to one side in light of what Jesus has done. Then, in light of this, he urges us to consider how we live...

Doctrine must be translated into practice...

We offer our lives as a living sacrifice to him: *Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. Do not conform 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. (Romans 12:1-2)*

Paul urges this ("I appeal to you") because of God's mercy. He wants them to offer (yield) their bodies (not just the physical self – the whole person in their network of relationships and institutions that characterise their ordinary lives) as living sacrifices. The Hebrew writer reminds us of the all-encompassing nature of worship writing: "Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise—the fruit of lips that openly profess his name. And do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased." (13:15-16)

Paul says that this is your spiritual/proper worship (*logikos* comes from *logos* = word/reason = reasonable). A logical (Paul doesn't use the Greek word for "spiritual"/*pneumatiken* but instead the one for "reasonable"/*logiken*) response to God's mercy is to offer all of ourselves, both outwardly and inwardly. It embraces the whole of life. Worship includes, but is so much more than, Sunday church services.

This will mean not conforming to the pattern of this world (*aion* = age). We live as those who are heirs of the age of renewal and resurrection, but we live it out in this age, this world. And then we will be transformed (this word is used at Jesus' transfiguration: Matt. 17:1-2 and Mark 9:2) by renewing our minds. It is a gradual process, as Paul reminds us in 2 Corinthians: "And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit." (3:18).

Dead sacrifices can't move: But we're living sacrifices that can climb off the altar. And we do climb off and conform to the pattern of this world so that our minds aren't transformed!

But we do want to be different don't we? Let's face it; we are the only Bible many people read - we're the flesh and blood edition. Do we have "proper value"?

Our values: As a church our "proper values" are: *"Love generously. Act justly. Forgive swiftly. Include selflessly. Practice humility."* It's difficult to not conform but, rather, live out these values. We've said that we'll try and do it: *"By the grace of God and relying on the Holy Spirit."*

Questions:

1. How do you remember that God is present at your meals?
2. Have I shrunk "worship" down to what I do at church on a Sunday or Wednesday?
3. How can you be tempted to conform to this world?
4. Which of our Church Values do you find most challenging and why?
5. How can I remember the grace of God?

6. How do you rely on the Holy Spirit?

Prayer:

Lord Jesus, Thank you for living through us to show folk your kingdom values. Amen.