



St. Michael's Church

CHARLESTON, SC

SUNDAY, JUNE 3, 2018

ROMANS 11:33-12:2

MATTHEW 16:24-28

PREACHER: THE REV. AL ZADIG, JR.

HELP US LORD TO BE SO CONNECTED TO YOU THAT WE MIGHT BECOME THE SERVANTS
OF OTHERS.

TAKE OUR LIPS AND SPEAK THROUGH THEM,
OUR MINDS AND THINK THROUGH THEM,
AND TAKE OUR HEARTS, AND SET THEM ON FIRE.

When was the last time, you did something...for the first time? These are the words of that philosopher, poet, and local singer, Darius Rucker from his song: **For the First Time**. It's a compelling question...a great question as we go into the summer months.

A grandmother named Shirley Dygert answered that question a couple of years ago when she went parachuting for the first time. This grandmother had wanted to do it all her life. So she and a skydiving instructor named David Hartsock board a plane that takes them 13,000 feet up, and off they go in a tandem jump. According to the Sports Illustrated article on the story, within seconds upon jumping, they realize neither of the parachutes are opening all the way. Chaos ensues, parachute lines get tangled. By this time they're falling thousands of feet, and with just seconds to go before impact, Hartsock controls what little of the parachute he can through the parachute toggles to rotate his body to absorb the force when the two of them hit the ground. That one act of sacrifice saves the grandmother's life. She comes out with injuries but would have a full recovery. Hartsock's sacrifice meanwhile, leaves him paralyzed from the neck down. To this day, Shirley weeps when she realizes what Dave did for her, saying, "How can somebody have that much love for another person?"

Doesn't this add meaning to the words we just heard out of Romans 12? Paul writing, "Therefore I urge you in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing." The major challenge for the preacher with Romans 12 is that every

word is a sermon. We could stay for hours in this amazing chapter. But what I want to focus in on is the word Sacrifice. My favorite definition of sacrifice is this: To devote with loss. For David Hartsock, his devotion to Shirley, would lead to the loss of walking again.

To truly understand the depth of what Paul means in Romans about Sacrifice, we need to look into the Old Testament. You see, after the fall of Adam and Eve, and to deal with our sin nature, God uses Sacrifice as THE avenue by which a sinning humanity could approach Him. In the Old Testament, the sins of the person transferred into an animal, often a perfect lamb, and then the lamb was sacrificed. The loss was sin through the lamb. Noah made animal sacrifices after the flood. Abraham was about to sacrifice his own son Isaac, then God redirects him to sacrifice a ram. This practice would continue through the rest of the Old Testament. Sacrifice, was to be the expression of a repentant heart.

Yet, over time, the hearts of the people grew cold toward the sacrifices. The Sacrifices grew to be duty bound, superficial, careless, and heartless. It's why the prophet Isaiah would write, "Stop bringing meaningless sacrifices! Your incense is detestable to me! God wants your heart!" Humanity failed in its calling.

Enter Jesus Christ, whose mission it would be, to take away the sins of the world, once and for all! We don't have animal sacrifices anymore because Jesus is the ultimate and perfect sacrifice for our sins. John the Baptist said it himself, "Look! There He is, the LAMB of God who takes away the sin of the world!" The perfect Lamb, sacrificed for us! It's why we say, "Therefore let us keep the feast!"

Hebrews 9 from the Message version: When Jesus arrived, He bypassed the old sacrifices consisting of goat and calf blood, instead using his own blood as the price to set us free once and for all. Jesus was able to do away with the penalty of sin by the sacrifice of Himself! Which tells us something about the character of God. God is so rich in love, devoted to us through the loss of His son. What does this mean for us? When you and I welcome Jesus into our hearts, and ask forgiveness... His blood is enough to cover all our sins! It is as if we had never sinned! That's called justification, Jesus saving us once and for all. Total and Real love.

You might ask, if Jesus died to take away our sins once and for all, then why does sin still exist? As we learned in Basic Christian Theology, because of Jesus, Sin is dethroned, but not destroyed. Jesus, by His sacrifice on the cross, dethroned Sin, giving us victory over it every time! Yet sin is not destroyed. It still creeps into our lives, but through Jesus, we have power over it every single time it rears its head! All we need to say is, "Jesus, deliver me from temptation. Lord Jesus forgive me." And we are forgiven!

This is why we live sacrificially. First, to say Thank you Jesus for what you have done. By the way, this is why Paul begins Romans Chapter 12 with the word Therefore. Therefore offer your bodies as living sacrifices... when you see word "therefore", it means read what was just said. What was just said is this, "Oh, the depths and riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God!" In other words, Paul is saying, "Because of What Jesus has done for us! Offer your bodies as living sacrifices"

Second, every time we sacrifice ourselves, we are being shaped more into the image of Jesus! This is called Sanctification. Sanctification means to be intensely focused on God's point of view by daily sacrificing, surrendering to His will. Which means the call to live sacrificially, the call to do good works is not so we can earn our salvation, or earn more of God's love. That's been done in the Sacrifice of Jesus Christ. We live sacrificially to say, Thank you Jesus, and by it, shape me into your image Lord!

When was the last time we sacrificed for an eternal consequence?
Through the Holy Spirit helping lead devotionals with our children **daily** to say thank you Jesus! The loss is our time, the gain is the faith of our children!

Through the Holy Spirit forgiving that person who hurt you to say thank you Jesus!
The loss is our hard exterior, our pride, and our desire to be right. The gain is the freedom we find in forgiveness!

When was the last time we sacrificed for an eternal consequence?

Through the Holy Spirit going on mission locally during Vacation bible School, or around the world. The loss is our time, and comfort zone, the gain is saving the eternal life of another!

Through the Holy Spirit joining or leading a small group. The loss is our mask and branded identity, the gain is spiritual muscle!

For all teenagers especially, through the Holy Spirit resisting drugs & alcohol. The felt loss might be superficial friends, but the gain is the power of God in your life!

Through the Holy Spirit inviting neighbors to church, the potential loss is rejection. The gain is their walk with Jesus and even their eternal salvation!

Through the Holy Spirit USING OUR GOD GIVEN GIFTS TO THE GLORY OF GOD.
The loss is...WOW Lord, I'm not in control! The gain, the highest joy we've ever had.

This is why we handed out all those gifting surveys last week, and do so again today! Offering our bodies as living sacrifices means knowing what our gifts are, and using them sacrificially! I think of Jim Holman sacrificially using his chief gift, which is loving others, by being a docent in this church during the week! I think of Karen and Kate Marjenhoff sacrificially using their gifts of hospitality to provide treats after services on Sunday. I think of Jeffrey Moll, sacrificially using his gifts of teaching to lead spiritual salvation tours during the week. I think of the 26 of you who said I'm going to step up my volunteering in the church by using my gifts. The loss is time, the gain is joy.

As I've said, the "why" of living sacrificially is to say thank you Jesus, shape me into your image. The result is this: we become transformers of culture instead of conformers to culture. Back to Romans 12: Present your bodies as a living sacrifice, not being conformed to this world, but transformed by the renewal of your mind. Who can forget

that Anglican lawyer William Wilberforce, who sacrificed the majority of his life to end slavery in Britain? He didn't sacrifice to earn his salvation, he did it in response to what Jesus did for him, and in response, William's heart changed, and the world around him was transformed!

To really cement this, Jesus in Matthew 16 gives a command and a warning about Sacrifice. First the command. If anyone wants to truly be my disciples, they must deny themselves, take up the cross and follow me. The Message version puts it like this: Self-sacrifice is the way to find yourself, your true self. What kind of deal is it to get everything you want but lose yourself? What could you ever trade for your soul?

Every time we say no to self, and no to the world, we are saying yes to God. As this happens, we and our world are being carved into the image and likeness of Jesus Christ. We are dethroning self to enthrone God! Sacrificing self hurts in the short term, but in the long term shapes the world.

But then, The Warning: This will require us to live for an audience of one. If we are living for the affirmation of the world, our hearts begin to die. The world won't be our final judge! Only Jesus. Jesus in Matthew says, "Don't be in such a hurry to please the world. Before you know it the Son of Man will arrive with all the splendor of his Father, accompanied by an army of angels and will repay each person for that they have done".

The Command Of Jesus? Self Sacrifice

The Warning of Jesus? Live for an audience of one to transform the world.

One of the most famous books in Christian literature is Foxe's Book of Martyrs, written by John Foxe in the 16th century to record the history of men and women who sacrificed their lives for Christ. Detailed are the stories of Philip (beaten, thrown into prison and then crucified), James (the brother of Jesus, age ninety-four was beaten and stoned to death), Peter (crucified), and Paul (beheaded).. Yet to live a sacrificial life, it doesn't always mean loss of life.

In John chapter 3, John the Baptist says, "I am not Jesus, in fact, He must increase, I must decrease." He must increase, and my desire to live for self must decrease. He must increase, and the pressures to conform to the world must decrease. This is why I love our diocese and this church! The Diocese of South Carolina and St. Michael's Church have taken a sacrificial stance to live under the power of Jesus, rather than to go along conforming to the world. The potential loss for taking such a sacrificial stance? All of this., our campus. Yet we know we live for an audience of one.

When was the last time you sacrificed? Finally this morning, I think here of The Queen of Sweden who centuries ago, sold her jewels to provide her people with much needed hospitals and orphanages. The loss was the heritage of all the diamonds that had been in the family. The gain? Something even more amazing. After she sold her jewels, and after the hospitals and orphanages were completed, she visited each one. At one site, tears of gratitude fell from the face of a bedridden woman. One tear actually fell onto the hand of the Queen. The queen was a bit jarred by this, she takes a step back and then realizes, God has delivered to me my true jewels - in the form of human hearts. Amen.