

Victory of the Lamb – November 25, 2018 - Imitating God: Living Generously

Romans 12:1-2 – When Empty is Full – Pastor Bill Limmer

This may be hard for you to believe but there was a pig and a chicken walking down Loomis. They came to our church sign which said, “Free Sunday breakfast.” The next sign to come up said: Menu: Ham and Eggs. The chicken turned to the pig and said, “See, even we can help at church.” “Yes,” said the pig, “but yours is only a contribution, mine is a sacrifice.”

On a much more serious note: Fifty-six men signed the Declaration of Independence. Their conviction resulted in untold sufferings for themselves and their families. Nine of the fifty-six fought and died from wounds or hardships of the war. Five were captured by the British and tortured before they died. Twelve had their homes ransacked and burned. Two lost their sons in the Revolutionary Army. Another had two sons captured. Carter Braxton of Virginia, a wealthy planter and trader, saw his ships sunk by the British navy. He sold his home and properties to pay his debts and died in poverty. At the battle of Yorktown, the British general Cornwallis had taken over Thomas Nelson’s home for his headquarters. Nelson told General George Washington to open fire on the Nelson home. The home was destroyed. Nelson died bankrupt. John Hart was driven from his wife’s bedside as she was dying. Their thirteen children fled for their lives. His fields and mill were destroyed. For over a year, he lived in forests and caves, returning home only to find his wife dead and his children vanished. A few weeks later, he died from exhaustion.

In the meantime, the one who was a persecutor of the church but later turned advocate and sacrifice for the church, an eyewitness of Jesus gives us this direction for our lives: Romans 12:1,2 **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. ² 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.** Sacrifices aren’t easy. As people living in the lap of luxury we greatly dislike sacrifice. We dislike sacrifice as like cats dislike baths. People make sacrifices all the time. But our sinful nature make sacrifices great things for lesser things. So we sacrifice prayer for worry instead, we have sacrifice peace with God for the approval of people, we sacrifice responsible family budgets for the sake of impulse buying, we sacrifice the spread of Christianity for the protection of our “good” name, we sacrifice helping others for the sake of selfishness, we sacrifice worshipping God for worshiping self and sports, and I’m not just talking about on Sundays right, we sacrifice purity for pornography, We sacrifice family time so we can enjoy our hobby. We sacrifice conversation with the one we love so that we can watch a game on TV. We sacrifice our lives to make a buck but we are often blind to this bankruptcy.

This morning we are continuing our series Imitating God: Living Generously and we are going to see through the life of Jesus that there is a time when empty is full. Suppose the good news writers, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John got together over some cheese, crackers, sausage and beer and came up with just one word to describe Jesus’ on the cross. What do you think that one word would have been. Lunched? Killed? Murdered? Executed? All those words are true to a degree. Jesus met his death in all those ways, but the real meaning of his death is conveyed in the word sacrifice. He gave up his life as a substitute offering to pay for and take away the sin of the world. God offered his son’s life. Jesus willingly gave it up.

To understand this a little better, remember that in the Jewish faith at the time of Jesus priests would offer lambs as a sacrifice for our sins, not actually taking away people's sins but reminding them that sin is so serious that the wages of sin is death and that the Savior would be the Savior through death. So the priest would take hold of a soft white lamb and slit its throat. It would be an incomplete picture of what happened on the cross when Jesus was crucified, was the Lamb of God came to take away the sins of the world. He was a sacrifice. He gave up. He became empty of life so that we might become full of life. **"I have come that you may have life and have it to the full."** And so Jesus gave up the greater for the lesser so that we the lesser could have the greater. He didn't empty Himself of His deity. He didn't give up being God. He couldn't do that. That was who He was. What He gave up were His rights as God. He gave up all the perks and privileges that were His because God had granted them to Him. He willingly let go of those privileges to meet our needs. He gave up heaven to come to earth, he gave up pure deity to taking on human flesh as well. He gave up the peace to experience the pain of every heartbeat and breath. He gave up praise for persecution. He gave up his well-being for being whipped. He gave wholeness for holiness. He gave up the image of God for being disfigured by the beating and the gravity of the cross. He gave up heaven to suffer hell for us. Although he was the author of life he gave up his life. And so he was rejected, betrayed, sold, accused, spit on, mocked, and sacrificed. Here is a depth here that we often miss by just reading the words and not putting our minds to work at Jesus didn't make a contribution at the cross, he made a sacrifice. The sacrifice in fact. Hebrews 7:27 **Unlike the other high priests, he does not need to offer sacrifices day after day, first for his own sins, and then for the sins of the people. He sacrificed for their sins once for all when he offered himself for all.** God did this because of his mercy. No one deserved it. No one earned it. It is all God. He emptied himself but because he emptied himself we can live to the full and our eternity is full of heaven. Jesus emptied Himself of.

Our motivation for **A living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God** is not to be that of fulfilling any legal requirements in order to gain favor with God. We already have his favor and his mercy. God doesn't need us to spend time with him but we need to spend time with him. So our motivation is to be one of grateful response who what God in his mercy has done for us, living sacrifices that are able to respond to God's mercy with service that is holy and pleasing. What kind of sacrifice is God going to ask you to give? There are sacrifices we are called upon to make for the benefit of others. For us, becoming a servant may mean sacrificing our pride and going to that person, even a subordinate, and admitting we were wrong. For you, sacrifice might mean giving up that amount of money you've set aside for some special purpose in order to meet a need of an aging parent or a child or somebody in the body of Christ who has a need. For you, a sacrifice might mean giving up your to-do list, the things you wanted to accomplish today, in order to be interrupted and meet the very real need of somebody God brings into your life. Sacrifice might mean it is going to take you thirty extra minutes to shop for friends of Jesus toy drive. It might cost you a couple of hours or couple hundred dollars for operation Jesus cares. It might cost you a pint of blood at the blood drive. One pint saving up to three lives. The surprise of the generosity of sacrifice is the fulfillment it brings to others. It is like when empty is full.

Think about Jesus. He was on the most important mission of all time. Yet He was constantly interrupted. Jesus' life illustrates that to be a servant requires sacrifice—the willingness to give up something important to us to meet the needs of others. He allowed interruptions to come into His life so that He could take care of the woman who was bleeding uncontrollably or the coworker's mother-in-law who fell ill. To be a servant means you sacrifice your rights in order to meet the needs of other people. Our standing, status identity is secure, because Hebrews 10:10 **we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.** So we can empty ourselves because we will always be full by grace through faith.