**Cranmer Group Sermon, Worship & Prayers**

**August 16th – The 10th Sunday after Trinity**

**‘Living Sacrifices’ (Romans 12:1-8)**

*Dear Friends,*

*I hope that this finds you well – it’s very good to be back with you after something of a break, with some of my time spent having lots of fun with Esther, as Clare has been finishing her dissertation.*

*Thank you so much to those of you who very kindly took the time to complete both the survey on re-opening our church buildings, and also the personal contact details form. Your very helpful feedback in the survey is being used to inform how we will open up for services once again, which will be within early September at latest, across a number, but at least initially not all, of our six churches.*

*I’d also mentioned the Diocesan Real Life discipleship course, which we will be hosting in St. Thomas’s Aslockton (or possibly online – we’re planning for the former, but it may have to be the latter). This is a great opportunity to strengthen your faith through excellent teaching and discussion – do find more details, and sign up for it, at* [*https://southwell.anglican.org/real-life-questions/*](https://southwell.anglican.org/real-life-questions/)*, or contact me if you’re unsure how to do so/don’t have internet access.*

*Best wishes, God bless, and hope to see you soon,*



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The Lord be with you **And also with you.**

**The Collect for The 10th Sunday after Trinity
(Common Worship)**

Lord of heaven and earth,
as Jesus taught his disciples to be persistent in prayer,
give us patience and courage
never to lose hope,
but always to bring our prayers before you;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.
**Amen.**

**Blest Are the Pure in Heart**

**Played by Deborah Davies**

Blest are the pure in heart,
For they shall see our God;
The secret of the Lord is theirs,
Their soul is Christ's abode.

The Lord who left the heavens
Our life and peace to bring,
To dwell in lowliness with men,
Their pattern and their King.

Still to the lowly soul
He doth himself impart
And for his dwelling and his throne
Chooseth the pure in heart.

Lord, we thy presence seek;
May ours this blessing be:
Give us a pure and lowly heart,
A temple meet for thee.

John Keble
**Bible Reading: Romans 12:1-8 (New International Version)**

**Read by Patrick Newton

*A living sacrifice***

*1 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.*

***Humble service in the body of Christ***

*3 For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the faith God has distributed to each of you. 4 For 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, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. 6 We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us. If your gift is prophesying, then prophesy in accordance with your faith; 7 if it is serving, then serve; if it is teaching, then teach; 8 if it is to encourage, then give encouragement; if it is giving, then give generously; if it is to lead, do it diligently; if it is to show mercy, do it cheerfully.*

**Sermon: ‘Living Sacrifices’ – Rev. Tim Chambers**
Every year, on August 14th, the Church of England commemorates the life of Father Maximilian Kolbe. So those of us who met for Morning Prayer on Zoom this last Friday spoke about him, as we joined together in our time of prayer.

Maximilian Kolbe was a Polish Catholic priest. Born in 1894, he founded a religious community that, after the Nazi invasion of Poland, soon attracted the attention of the occupying German authorities. Kolbe soon found himself arrested, and interned at Auschwitz. In the camp, he was known to give his own meager food to other prisoners, even as his own health crumbled; to hear confessions; and, in the face of stern prohibitions, to celebrate mass.

In late July, a fellow prisoner in Kolbe’s block escaped. In retribution, the camp commandant selected ten prisoners at random to be killed. One of the ten was a captured Polish soldier, Franciszek Gajowniczek. When his number was called, Gajowniczek cried out in agony.

Maximilian Kolbe stepped forward. I am a Catholic priest from Poland”, he told the guards. “I would like to take his place, because he has a wife and children." Kolbe’s captors accepted the swap. He and the nine others were thrown into a cell, where, after a fortnight deprived of food and water, those who were still alive were killed by lethal injection. Maximilian Kolbe was murdered on August 14th, 1941. Franciszek Gajowniczek, transferred from camp to camp, survived the war, and lived on for another fifty-four years.

Father Maximilian Kolbe – St. Maximilian Kolbe, as he now is – sacrificed his life out of love and pity for another human being, in the most appalling of circumstances.

For only the tiniest fraction of us who follow Jesus Christ, will we ever find ourselves in a position where God may place a call on our lives, to make a sacrifice like that of Kolbe.

But all of us who declare Jesus to be Lord over our lives are urged, in the words of St. Paul in our reading this morning, to “offer our bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God. This”, Paul continues, “is [our] true and proper worship”.

What, in this dramatic phrase, does St. Paul mean?

Why is this something that we are called to do?

And how might you and I be this “living sacrifice”, as we follow in the footsteps of Jesus Christ?

Let’s look at each of these three questions in turn.

Over the course of the summer, we’ve been journeying through St. Paul’s letter to the first Christians of Rome. We’ve seen that much of what we read in it is rather different from most of Paul’s other letters to groups of Christian believers. Unlike many of those letters, which often deal with pastoral concerns amongst these communities, it’s far more concerned with the basis for the faith that these followers of Jesus Christ profess. It’s far more ‘academically theological’, if you like. But in Chapter 12 (we’ve skipped a bit since we were last together, looking at the glories of Chapter 8!), Paul’s tone and the content of what he says finally becomes much more practical as well – here, it’s also about “the day-to-day stuff of being a Christian.”

In this context, what does “offering our bodies as a living sacrifice” mean?

To understand this, we need to go back to the Old Testament, and to the practice of the people of Israel of sacrificing to God in the Temple in Jerusalem, animals such as bulls or goats, as a way of atoning for the wrong that they had done in their lives; as an offering that would bring them back into right relationship with God. What was believed by the Jews to be happening through those acts in the Temple, is reflected in the word itself – ‘sacrifice’ means ‘to make sacred’; ‘to make holy’. Through offering a sacrifice, you made yourself ‘holy’ once again; you restored the relationship between you and God.

But what Jesus did by sacrificing himself on the cross, was to remove all need for any further sacrifices of that historical nature. God’s only son went to his agonizing death by crucifixion, in order that you and I, and everyone who declares that Jesus is Lord over their life, would no longer have to go through any of that Temple ritual. This – admittedly, answering a bit of our “why?” question before we’ve fully addressed our “what?” question, is what we’re called to do - as Paul says in chapter 12, verse 1 – precisely because of God’s “mercy” in sending Jesus Christ to this earth, to take onto himself all of our sin and guilt and shame, on the cross. As we’ve seen from what St. Paul writes earlier in his letter to the Romans, God opens wide his arms to us in the person of Jesus, without us having done anything to merit it at all – “while we were still sinners”. And so we, as Christ’s followers, are called to be “living sacrifices” in his service and in the service of others, precisely in response to the fact that he made the ultimate sacrifice for each one of us.

If you play chess, you’ll know that one of the most dramatic and effective moves you can make is a ‘sacrifice’. You make a move that appears to be losing a piece, perhaps even an error, but it becomes clear very shortly after that what you’ve in fact done is given up a piece of a particular value, in order that you can either take another piece of greater worth, or gain a significant positional advantage, or even create a path to winning the game outright.

As Christians, we’re called to give up - to sacrifice - that which drives those who hold the values of the world around us; the values of individualism, of consumerism, of materialism, of cynicism - all the -ism’s! – and the consequences of these: selfishness; unhealthy ambition; a desire constantly to have the newest, smartest and most expensive; boredom; indifference.

We’re called, as St. Paul says, not to “conform to the pattern of this world”, having our lives dictated to by all of these things that are the tricks and tools of the enemy, attempting to draw us away from relationship with, and dependence on, God. But rather, we are called to allow the Holy Spirit into our lives; into our hearts; into our minds, and in so doing allowing him to transform us more and more into the likeness of Christ. And then it seems, Paul says, that by this transformation within us, we too in turn become more able to discern what is “good and pleasing and perfect” in God’s eyes, and so increasingly do just that, to God’s glory and for his pleasure, and in order that we might have life - both in this world and the next - and have it to the full.

So if that’s “what” being a ‘living sacrifice’ is; not giving in to the world, but being transformed by the Holy Spirit working in you, into the likeness of Christ; and if the “why” of being a living sacrifice is twofold – on the one hand, it’s a response to what Christ has done for us on the cross, and on the other, it’s to bring greater glory to God through our lives; what about the “how”?

Paul in fact spends much of the next 3-4 chapters explaining in many practical ways just “how” we can be this “living sacrifice” to the glory of God, and for the benefit of others. But in the first instance – and given that this is first, I believe we should ascribe at least some sense of precedence to these areas above other things about which Paul writes – it’s by using the varied gifts which God has given to each one of us.

Paul writes in the rest of our passage this morning, of the way in which those of us who are part of the body of Christ, are called to use our respective talents and giftings in the service of those others in our church families – by which I mean not just our particular village’s church, but the wider Benefice, and to the Diocese and the Anglican church as a whole, as well as, of course, other denominations too.

We all possess different gifts and skills and passions that complement one another – serving; giving; leading; encouraging; showing mercy. As such, in an image of the parts of the body all functioning in complementary ways, in order that the whole may be complete, Paul emphasizes (as he does again in 1 Corinthians 12) the part that every member of the Body of Christ has a part to play, as this “living sacrifice”, for the glory of God.

I know that very many of you have, over the recent months of lockdown, given particular support not only your brothers and sisters in Christ in our six churches, but also your friends and neighbours throughout our communities, in so many different practical ways. Thank you so much for all that you have especially been doing during this extraordinarily tough time, and indeed also for all that you do under ‘normal’ circumstances within our communities as well.

As we move towards opening up our churches for services again, within the beginning of September, we will be navigating new waters together, and we will find that there are things we have done in the past, using specific people’s gifts, which – at least for the time being – we’ll no longer need, or indeed be able to do. And we’ll also find, I’ve no doubt, that there will be gifts amongst you, hitherto used far less, which will come to the fore as we re-discover what it is to be the body of Christ all gathered together once again, in the same physical place, albeit under different and difficult circumstances. I pray that, to the glory of God, each one of us will find hidden gifts within ourselves, and use them in “humble service” for one another and for our communities, and in this sacrifice for the sake of others, we will all find a pathway to God’s peace, and love and joy.

In Jesus’s name I pray, Amen.

**Intercessions**

**Led by Annie Dickinson**
Let’s pause and ponder the greatness of God – the beauty and mystery of creation; the wonder that God so loves all of humanity that he would allow his beloved Son to die that we might gain Life eternally; the mystery of His sacrifice that brought us Life, and the wonder that the God of creation should hold us as his children whom he values above all things.

And as we think of this amazing Grace towards us, surely we desire
to live our life in such a way that will bring Him honour and pleasure…

**To stand strong in our faith and to trust in God…**

Lord, help us to grow closer to you day by day; to notice as we look around us, the wonders of your creation, and to recognise in all that we see your Living Presence and your Grace.

Lord in your mercy,
**hear our prayer.**

To live to honour and please God…
**To trust Him with our health, with our well-being, with our lives…**

Lord, bring us peace during these days. Help us to know that whatever befall, we are eternally safe in your care. Lord, give us your Peace.

Lord in your mercy,
**hear our prayer.**

To bring God honour and pleasure…
**To trust our friends and our loved ones to God’s care, and to pray for His Blessing on them…**

Father, we ask your blessing on all those we love, whether near or far.
[Take a moment to think of those you want to bring before God now]

Heavenly Father, we ask you to bless them, to guard them and to bring them closer to you day by day.

Lord in your mercy,
**hear our prayer.**

To bring God honour and pleasure…
**To think of our neighbours and show them grace, generosity and care…**

Father God, fill us with a spirit of grace and generosity, of care and of forgiveness.

Strengthen us so that we may become a blessing to those in our communities, to those we work with, and to those we meet each day.

Help us to grow in your image, and reflect your Light in the world.

Lord in your mercy,
**hear our prayer.**

Heavenly Father, build us up as children of Light, strengthen us in our faith, build us together as your church in these six communities.

Help us to work with Tim and with Clare to bring hope and peace and comfort to those living and working in our villages. Help us to be a blessing to Tim and Clare, and we ask you, Lord, to bless and strengthen them, and to keep them and Esther safe and well.

Lord in your mercy,
**hear our prayer.**

Merciful Father accept these prayers,
for the sake of your Son, our Saviour, Jesus Christ.
**Amen.**

…and a Prayer in recognition of VJ Day, the 75th anniversary of which was yesterday, August 15th, and which was marked by the ringing of Whatton’s bells, for the first time since lockdown:

God our Father,
in the dying and rising of your Son Jesus Christ,
you have brought life and salvation out of cruelty and death.
We mark Victory in Japan
in gratitude for the courage of the Allied forces
who suffered for freedom in the Far East campaign
and in sorrow for all that hinders
the coming of your kingdom of peace.
Give us wisdom to learn from the bitter memories of war,
and hearts that long for the unity of all nations.
We ask all this in the name of Jesus,
in whom there is no east or west, no north or south,
but one fellowship of love across the whole earth.
**Amen.**

**The Lord’s Prayer**As our Saviour taught us, so we pray:

**Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Lead us not into temptation
but deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power,
and the glory are yours
now and for ever.
Amen.**

**The Collect for The 10th Sunday after Trinity
(Book of Common Prayer)**

Let thy merciful ears, O Lord, be open to the prayers of thy humble servants; and that they may obtain their petitions make them to ask such things as shall please thee; through Jesus Christ our Lord.
**Amen.**

**Let All the World**

**Played by Deborah Davies**

Let all the world in every corner sing,
My God and King!
The heavens are not too high,
His praise may thither fly;
The earth is not too low,
His praises there may grow.
Let all the world in every corner sing,
My God and King!

Let all the world in every corner sing,
My God and King!
The church with psalms must shout,
No door can keep them out;
But, above all, the heart
Must bear the longest part.
Let all the world in every corner sing,
My God and King!

George Herbert

**A Closing Blessing**

God the Holy Trinity make you strong in faith and love,
defend you on every side,
and guide you in truth and peace;
and the blessing of God almighty,
the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit,
be among you & remain with you always.
**Amen.**

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.
**In the name of Christ, Amen.**