**Reading and Reflection 23rd August Eleventh Sunday after Trinity**

**Collect of the Day**

O God, you declare your almighty power most chiefly in showing mercy and pity: mercifully grant to us such a measure of your grace, that we, running the way of your commandments, may receive your gracious promises, and be made partakers of your heavenly treasure;
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, Amen.

**Reading Romans 12.1-8**

1I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. 2Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God – what is good and acceptable and perfect. 3For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of yourself more highly than you ought to think, but to think with sober judgement, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned. 4For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, 5so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another. 6We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us: prophecy, in proportion to faith; 7ministry, in ministering; the teacher, in teaching; 8the exhorter, in exhortation; the giver, in generosity; the leader, in diligence; the compassionate, in cheerfulness.

**Reflection**

“1Present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God” This phrase in Paul’s letter to the Romans so well known. When we read this does it make you feel like you need to check out how you are physically? Present your bodies … not so much are you beach ready but are you ready for God to use you? What might it mean for us to see ourselves as a living sacrifice? Do we need to join a gym and watch what we eat and drink?! No there is something that may help further in the text.

“4As in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function.” Paul goes on to tell us that we are a community of bodies all of whom can be offered to God as his means of ministry in the world today, and that we CAN all be different, and we ALL have different gifts too.

Henri Nowen writes this: ***We Are Called To Be Fruitful***

*You have to be really aware of the difference between fruitfulness and success because the world is always talking to you about your success. Society keeps asking you: “Show me your trophies. Show me, how many books have you written? Show me, how many games did you win? Show me, how much money did you make? Show me. . . .” And there is nothing wrong with any of that. I am saying that finally that’s not the question. The question is: “Are you going to bear fruit?” And the amazing thing is that our fruitfulness comes out of our vulnerability and not just out of our power. Actually it comes out of our powerlessness. If the ground wants to be fruitful, you have to break it open a little bit.*

*The hard ground cannot bear fruit; it has to be raked open. And the mystery is that our illness and our weakness and our many ways of dying are often the ways that we get in touch with our vulnerabilities. You and I have to trust that they will allow us to be more fruitful if lived faithfully. Precisely where we are weakest and often most broken and most needy, precisely there can be the ground of our fruitfulness. That is the vision that means that death can indeed be the final healing—because it becomes the way to be so vulnerable that we can bear fruit in a whole new way. Like trees that die and become fuel, and like leaves that die and become fertilizer, in nature something new comes out from death all the time. So you have to realize that you are part of that beautiful process, that your death is not the end but in fact it is the source of your fruitfulness beyond you in new generations, in new centuries.*

Henri Nouwen reminds us that to be a living sacrifice all we need to do is offer all ourselves to God. We don’t have to have an amazing ministry of pray or to be the best musician or the most fabulous host. We just need to take who we are and allow God to work through us, and with us to bring his kingdom closer. Giving ourselves to God is how he plants the seeds for his kingdom, giving ourselves to God is accepting who we are and what are the fabulous shiny parts of us, and what are the murky challenges of being us, and knowing that God knows them all, and loves us in all of who we are right now. And our power to be of use to God is not only in this life, but beyond into our death as well.

Present yourself, not buffed and powdered, not spray tanned and lean bodies, but present yourself for who you are, what you are, and our God of love’s heart will leap for joy in receiving the best gift you can ever offer.

**Prayers by Carrie Snaden**  *we sit or kneel to pray:*

Everlasting God, we thank You for the gift of Your Son Jesus Christ and for revealing him as Messiah and Saviour of the World. We pray that we learn not to conform to the pattern of this world but to offer our bodies as a living sacrifice to You our Lord in true and proper worship. Lord, in Your mercy, Hear our prayer.

Holy God, we pray for Your church and ask that it might always provide a solid foundation upon which we can anchor our lives.   We especially pray for Christians who pay a heavy price for their faith; who daily experience hostility, from their governments, employers and neighbours, as a result of their identification with Christ. Lord, in Your mercy, Hear our prayer.

Father God, help us be reliable and honest in what we do, and friendly to all we meet in our daily lives. Help us always to give our best, to work to our fullest and never be ashamed to confess your name.  Help us to cheerfully use our God-given gifts whether they be prophesying, serving, teaching, encouraging, giving, leading or being merciful. Lord, in Your mercy, Hear our prayer.

Gracious God, we pray for the ill, the lonely and distressed especially those tormented by fear arising from the Global Pandemic. We pray for healing and wholeness in their lives and we pray for ourselves.  Help us to bring life and love, joy and hope, to those who live in despair and give help to all those treating the effects of Covid-19 and those working to find a cure. (add names of those requesting prayers)
Lord, in Your mercy, Hear our prayer.

Merciful God, remember the souls of your servants now fallen asleep and for those who are saddened by their passing. Be with the bereaved in their loneliness and give them the faith to look beyond their present troubles to Your Son Jesus Christ who died and rose again and who lives forevermore. (add names of the recently departed or on Anniversary list) Lord, in Your mercy, Hear our prayer.

Faithful God, forgive us when we only turn to You when things trouble us and when we forget to thank You for Your blessings and bounty. Help us to recognise all the wonderful things in Your world for which we should be grateful and send us out into the coming week ready to show our gratitude in all that we do and say. Release the gifts You have given to each one, so that in us and through us, Your kingdom might come and Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

Merciful Father: Accept these prayers for the sake of Your Son our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen

*concluding with:*

**Our Father, which art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil, for thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory forever and ever Amen.**

Copyright acknowledgement (where not already indicated above):

Romans 12.1-8 © 1989 National Council of the Churches of Christ, USA Psalm 138 © The