

Sermon—Sunday, July 6, 2008
Eighth Sunday After Pentecost (Proper 9)
By Tim Ljunggren

First Lesson: **Genesis 24:34-38, 42-49, 58-67**
Psalm: **Psalm 45: 11-18**
Second Lesson: **Romans 7:15-25a**
Gospel Lesson: **Matthew 11:16-19, 25-30**

“For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”

Today, we continue our discussion of “sacrifice” and what that word is supposed to mean to us, both as individual Christians and as a specific faith community.

Last week we heard the story of Abraham and Isaac and how God asked the unthinkable of Abraham: in order to prove his faith, Abraham was asked to sacrifice his beloved son.

Of course, that story has special ramifications for us as a Christian community, because it foreshadows what is to come between God and his own Son, Jesus—as we all know, the story of Abraham and Isaac can be seen as a mirror to the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus. Once again, a parent is asked to sacrifice a beloved child in the name of faith.

As I mentioned last Sunday, when God asks God’s people to sacrifice something, God is not asking them to unwillingly give something up; instead, God is asking them to willingly give into God’s sacred desire.

There can be no sacrifice without that willingness on our part.

In today’s Gospel lesson, Jesus reassures his listeners—and us—with words of comfort: “Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”

Here, the notion of “sacrifice” finds its home in Christ’s loving arms. Here, sacrifice is seen as an invitation for us to drop our worries and fears and broken hearts and to simply find rest and solace in Christ.

Ultimately, the notion of “sacrifice” finds its true meaning in us giving up our control and leaning on God, no matter how difficult that can be at times. As we soon find out, “sacrifice” and “control” are not synonymous with one another. You can’t sacrifice and retain your control, no matter how much you want to. The ultimate sacrifice that we can make as human beings is to turn our lives completely over to God without hesitation.

Ironically, it’s this complete giving of ourselves over to God that opens the door to complete freedom, something that we all crave as human beings.

We should also note that “sacrifice” is a two-way street: when we sacrifice to God, God sacrifices on our behalf as well. This was the meaning behind Jesus words when he told his listeners: “All things have been handed over to me by my Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.” Jesus, who willingly chose to sacrifice his life to God, assures us that God returns that sacrifice with a sacrifice of God’s own—the complete trust and revelation of God through Christ.

It’s a funny thing, really; our notion of “sacrifice”—painfully giving of ourselves and our resources until there’s nothing left—is not what God has in mind. Instead, we are to sacrifice ourselves in order to find the beauty and magnificence of God in our lives. We are to sacrifice ourselves to gain refreshment, to become fully alive in the Lord.

That can be a very scary thing, you know. When we find refreshment—when we take Jesus at his word and allow ourselves to find rest for our souls, then there’s the danger of having to change our minds about who we are and what we’re supposed to be doing as a faithful community. Our excuses for not doing God’s will in our lives flutter away. Our minds are changed, along with our hearts.

We are forced to relate to God, others, and ourselves in new and totally

different ways. And that can be scary, for that kind of sacrifice may demand that we change our own status quo and start doing things just a bit differently.

No longer can we afford to demean or find fault with others; our new sacrifice demands that we look at others—and our ourselves—with a humble heart. No longer can we afford to hold anything back from God; our new sacrifice demands that we give everything that we possibly can to a God who repays us in ways that we can only dream are possible.

Through this sacrifice we are refreshed. Through this sacrifice we are renewed. Through this sacrifice we are received. Through this sacrifice we are removed from our normal cares and worries and find ourselves placed on hallowed ground.

“For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”

Are we ready for this kind of sacrifice? Are we ready to release our burdens and carry our load? Are we ready to be carried forward by God through Christ?

I pray that we are. ...

Amen.

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