

“Living Sacrifices”

Romans 12:1-2

Preached by Dr. Robert F. Browning, Pastor
Smoke Rise Baptist Church
Stone Mountain, Georgia
June 12, 2005

Communion Devotion

Last Monday, Wheeler Conkling moved. He left Roswell and moved to the outskirts of Tegucigalpa, Honduras. He will be an unpaid volunteer working at the Latin American Missionary and Bible Institute. The institute, a training ground for the young people of Honduras preparing for ministry, provides day care for children and instruction for mothers seeking jobs in the city. He will help take care of the children of these mothers and the children that are left on their doorstep with no place to go. Needless to say, this will be hard work in one of the poorest regions of the world.

I need to tell you more about Mr. Conkling. He is not a college student or recent graduate signing up for a tour of duty in the Peace Corps. He is eighty-five years old. He has five children and a slew of grandchildren. He is a WW II veteran, a chemist and a former CEO of a small company.

In 2003, his wife of sixty-two years died. He contemplated several options, including moving to a retirement home to enjoy a sedentary lifestyle. Instead, he participated in two mission trips to Honduras through his church, St. David’s Episcopal in Roswell. This hooked him. After returning this spring from his second trip, he told his five children that he was moving to Honduras.

Of course, his children tried to dissuade him and encouraged him to return to a more normal lifestyle. They talked to him about the sacrifices that all of them would have to make if he moved so far away. In the end, he won them over and they gave him their blessing. I’m sure Monday was a day filled with mixed emotions for all of them.

Why would an eighty-five year old widower make such a life-altering decision? He was overwhelmed by the need he saw in Honduras and could not ignore it once he arrived back in Atlanta. As a result, he decided he wanted to spend the remainder of his days making a difference in people’s lives. I hope the Lord gives him good health for many days. The people of Honduras need him.

I think Mr. Conkling has captured the essence of our text today. I could not find a better example of what it means to be a “living sacrifice.” His story reminded me of two lines in a book I am reading, If God is Love by Philip Gulley and James Mulholland. “To be full of the Spirit is to have your heart broken by the same things that break the heart of God.” The other is, “We don’t need to accept Jesus into our hearts as much as we need to have the same heart as Jesus.”

When we gather around the communion table, our minds naturally focus upon the sacrifices that Jesus made to bring truth to the world and make it better, the ultimate one costing him his life. I don’t doubt that we are overcome with humility and gratitude.

Let us remember, though, that gratitude is best expressed in deed. Our response to Jesus’ sacrifices should be sacrifices of our own to bring truth to the world and make it better. Our hearts need to break over the same things that break God’s heart and we need to do something about them.

Isn’t this what Paul meant when he wrote, “Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as **living sacrifices**, holy and pleasing to God. This is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer 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” Romans 12:1-2.

You cannot read this passage and miss the contrast to the cult sacrifices of slain animals. **The God of the empty tomb finds no pleasure in us trying to fill it up.** He finds great delight,

however, in our desire to take the new life given to us by the resurrected Lord to advance His kingdom by meeting the needs of others.

For many years, Ben Stein has written a biweekly column called “Monday Night at Morton’s.” Morton’s is a steak house frequented by movie stars and famous people. Now Mr. Stein is terminating the column to move on to other things.

In his last column he wrote, “I have come to realize that the life lived to help others is the only one that matters and it is my duty, in return for the lavish life God has devolved upon me, to help others He has placed in my path. This is my highest and best use as a human.”

I want to challenge you to embrace Mr. Stein’s words this morning. Discover what breaks God’s heart and what you can do to heal His wounds. Make a commitment to become a “living sacrifice” each day of your life as you live to help others in His name.