

We Are an Offering

Stanton Reformed Church

November 17, 2019

Focus: The midwives, Shiphrah and Puah employed their vocation toward God's ways, a risky, submissive sacrifice.

Function: Paul suggests we worship God by offering ourselves, our skills and vocation as an offering, sacrifice.

Do/Think: What of ourselves are we employing toward God's ways as a sacrifice?

Texts:

[Exodus 1:8-22](#)

[Romans 12:1-8](#)

The worship committee has asked that the choir introduce a song of the month, something simple that might even stay with us after we go home on Sundays.

We heard this month's song earlier in the service. It's called "We are an offering."

We lift our voices,
We lift our hands,
We lift our lives up to you,
We are an offering.

All that we have,
All that we are,
All that we hope to be,
We give to you...

The song echoes the words of Paul from our reading today in his letter to the Romans, Brothers and sisters, because of God's mercies, I encourage you to present your bodies as a living sacrifice - this is your spiritual act of worship.

You'll see this same verse later in the worship service, although from a different version.

It's our invitation to give - it says: Here's what I want you to do, God helping you: Take your every day, ordinary life -
Your sleeping, eating, going-to-work, and walking-around life -
And place it before God as an offering.
Embracing what God does for you is the best thing you can do for God.

Present your bodies; place it before God as an offering.

Why?

Because of God's mercies.

The first readers of Paul's letter and we today know of God's mercies, God's kindness, God's faithfulness in our world.

If they were honest, if we are honest, we know that God has always and will always be the one pursuing us in relationship.

In other words, we don't choose God first. God chooses us first.

This is a cornerstone of the Reformed tradition actually. We do not believe that we, in our wisdom or even in our need, decided to turn to God and follow God.

Instead, we believe God has always been the one pursuing relationship with us.

God has always done the first acts of love. God has always been the one pointing us in the right path, the right choice, the right attitude, the right actions.

Sometimes we heed God's guidance, sometimes we ignore God's guidance. Sometimes God has to work at getting our attention - over and over God sends little words of advice, encouragement, hints...

God is the one who makes the first move. God loves us. We enjoy God's love.

God blesses us. We enjoy God's blessings.

God guides us. We walk in the path, one step behind the guidance of a faithful, loving God.

And so when Paul says - listen, we know God's blessings. We know God's certain, forthcoming love for us. Because we know God is with us... let's yield who we are, offer ourselves as a sacrifice.

The midwives are great examples of yielding their lives to God's love.

Shiphrah and Puah. Two midwives at the time of the Hebrew enslavement to the Egyptians.

The story goes that the Hebrew people had grown numerous and no matter how hard Pharaoh worked them, they multiplied.

Pharaoh comes to the midwives and instructs them to kill the baby boys. But the story says that the midwives feared God.

Fear in the scriptures is not the word for scared of - it means holding a certain awe, a profound, holy understanding of. The midwives held a profound, holy understanding of God.

And so they disobeyed Pharaoh.

In fact they lied to him too. I was reading that they even used his own foul way of seeing the Hebrew people in their lie.

They said something like, well Pharaoh as you know these Hebrew women are like animals, they give birth before we can get to them.

Their lie worked.

And among the babies they saved was Moses.

These midwives offered their lives as a living sacrifice. They yielded their vocation in an act of worship to God.

Rabbi Jonathan Magonet has called these two midwives "ezer women"

Ezer is the Hebrew word for Helper. They helped those who needed their help.

Ordered to carry out genocide, these two brave women risked their lives by disobeying the Pharaoh.

This is what help means in the scriptures - it is not a sideline position. A helper reaches in and saves.

These women were willing to stand bravely against evil; they used their professional expertise to reach in and save people in a time of crisis.

Their story is one of sacrifice.

This is a story of surrendering one's life.

This is a story of submitting to God's ways over and against the ways of the world.

Sacrifice, surrender, submit.

This is what helping means in the scripture.

And we see it all the time here at church.

Just this week, I know of one of you who who emailed minutes in the wee hours of the morning - and when I asked it wasn't because you couldn't sleep. It was because work was just a little bit too involved this week.

Sacrifice.

Just this week, several hours were used to organize and execute a meal for 50+ of us on a Friday.

There are dozens of things any of us could do instead of organizing a meal for church.

This week, folks gave up hours for meetings. They spent their own time planning Sunday school lessons.

This week, folks chose to take the last minutes of their day to pray for those listed in the bulletin.

Why? In light of God's mercies, present your bodies as living sacrifices.

Sacrifice. Surrender. Submit.

Those three words are wildly different than volunteering. Right?

Don't get me wrong, there is nothing wrong with volunteering.

Church wouldn't work without volunteers.

Holly trail wouldn't work without volunteers.

We have volunteer firefighters and rescue workers.

Most of the time these days, high school and college students have to perform volunteer hours as part of the curriculum.

To volunteer is not the same thing as sacrifice.

Sacrificing requires a different kind of motivation than volunteering.

Sacrifice is not something we enjoy talking about. Surrender is not something we aspire to. Submission - same thing. We don't like using the word submit.

In fact, I was thinking about it. You know there are dozens of times we have to agree to things online. And I rarely even pause anymore.

But if it says submit. If I have to click something that says submit, I pause - do I really want to do this?

Shiphrah and Puah submitted their lives, put their vocations at risk by serve God's purposes.

Paul is asking us to submit our lives, to be a living sacrifice,

to place ourselves in the offering plate each week - heck, each day.

Paul is asking that we sacrifice our resources. Sacrifice is not just giving what we don't need, the extra, the left overs.

Sacrifice hurts a bit, right?

Surrendering our money to God is not easy. We want it for ourselves.

Submitting our time to God is not easy. We want it for ourselves.

But this is our spiritual worship, a fully embodied worship is a living sacrifice.

All that we have,
All that we are,
All that we hope to be...

Might we be living sacrifices. Amen.