

Jumbo Shrimp, friendly fire, random order, or to quote the singer John Legend, perfect imperfections. All of these are examples of oxymorons. An oxymoron is a pairing of two contradictory words for an artistic effect. In fact, the word oxymoron means sharp-dull, or pointedly foolish. The word oxymoron, is an oxymoron.

The Bible is filled with these apparent contradictions and oxymorons. The first will be last. Jesus is the God-man. We as Christians are sinner-saints. I could go on with this list of oxymorons and other paradoxes.

The oxymoron I want to focus on today is the one that Paul presents to us in our Epistle reading from Romans 11:33—12:8. Chapter 12 verse 1 will be the basis for our sermon today. **“I appeal to you ...to present your bodies as a living sacrifice,...”** A living sacrifice is an oxymoron. Sacrifices involved death and any living sacrifice—whether it be a cow, goat, or sheep, wouldn’t stay living very long. What we’ll learn on this confirmation Sunday is that **OUR LIVING SACRIFICE MAKES US INTO LIVING SACRIFICES.**

Paul starts our text with an exclamation of praise. **“Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!”** Indeed, our God is a God of mystery. He is an oxymoron God who acts in ways we least expect. We see this as I, Christ has presented Himself as a living sacrifice for us.

Again, let’s read chapter 12 verse 1 again in its entirety: **“I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.”** We as Christians cannot consider our act of sacrifice without first looking to the mercies of God that Paul talks about.

The mercies of God are the kind things that God has done for us. These are the things that God has done for us that we don’t deserve. These are the stories that have filled these confirmands religious education throughout their days of childhood. To be certain stories like the sacrifice of Isaac, where Abraham *was* going to sacrifice his son Isaac, but at the last moment, God provided a substitute to prevent that living sacrifice from taking place. Stories like the Passover, where the mercies of God spared the children of Israel and instead a lamb took its place. Stories like the temple of Jerusalem, where countless animals would be slaughtered to pay for the sins of the people. But everything in our story culminates in what Jesus has done for us on the cross.

Instead of an animal being slaughtered, the very Son of God was slaughtered that we may live. Instead of animals being killed year after year, Jesus died on the cross once and for all. He presented His body as a living sacrifice to present us spotless, blameless, and holy in God’s sight.

Because of Jesus Christ, our living sacrifice being tossed out and rejected, we have a place in God's family. Because of Jesus Christ, our living sacrifice taking on our sins, we have forgiveness of every wrong that we'll ever commit—past, present, future. Because of Jesus Christ, our living sacrifice obeyed God's law perfectly, it's not an oxymoron for you to be called holy and perfect because His perfect is yours.

In view of these mercies of God, we can confidently believe, II. God transforms us into living sacrifices. I'll read the verse again, **“I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.”** We become like that which we worship. Money worshippers start to look a bit green as they grow green in envy over those who have more green than them. People who want popularity start to act and look like the people they want to attract. People who worship fitness start to look like those barbells that they're so busy lifting.

Our Lord Jesus Christ is a living sacrifice who died that we might live, so it comes as no surprise that if His road led to a cross, so might ours. One Lutheran reformer commented of this verse saying, we as Christians are “...called not to pleasures, riches, and power of this world, but to a violent death, dreadful hatred, and afflictions of every kind as we are attacked by the devil and by wicked men” (Phillip Melancthon, *Romans*, 212).

And this is what confirmation is all about. We talked about this on day one. You're about to take a vow saying that you'd rather die than deny Jesus Christ your lord. You would rather join Him as a living sacrifice on the altar, than to scamper away in fear. Those of us who have been confirmed or are about to be confirmed should on one level affirm that indeed, nothing, not worldly success, not COVID-19, not politics, not even life itself is more important to us than Jesus both what He has done for us and who He is.

“I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect. For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned.”

Yet every part of us fights this impulse. Being a living sacrifice happens every day of our life. It isn't just dying for our faith. Yet living sacrifices want to crawl off the altar. Every bone in us wants to conform to this world, our mind doesn't want to be transformed. We want to think of ourselves as the bee's knees, we want to be number 1, we don't want to think with sober judgment.

If it completely were up to us, devout Christian would be an oxymoron. It would be an oxymoron, a contradiction, because certainly none of us can fulfill these words of Paul by our own power or strength. None of us can live the perfect Christ-like life of sacrificing for one another, acting with humility, and living by the logic of Christ's love rather than the ways of the world.

Living sacrifices, and indeed, a part of us dies inside when we close our mouths to listen to someone with whom we disagree. Part of us dies inside when we sacrifice plans to help someone in need. Part of us dies inside when a pastor or a Christian friend calls us out for our sin, and we realize we need to make a change. Part of us dies inside when our big head gets deflated and we realize that we aren't the center of the universe after all. Part of us dies inside when we need help, and we rely on the body of Christ with its many members to fill up in us what is lacking. In these things, part of us dies, and that is a good thing.

III. The Holy Spirit bestows life in living sacrifices. Living sacrifice, this is where the oxymoron comes in. This is where there is an apparent contradiction. Doing all these things might hurt. It might cause little deaths, but it is the sinner in us that is being sacrificed and tossed away. It's the cutting of the deadwood. It's the surgery to remove the cancerous lump. It's the bleaching of the mold. The Holy Spirit is working tirelessly in you to heal you of your diseases, and by the working of His Word and Sacrament, slowly and surely to make you into a kinder, gentler, more understanding member of the body of Christ. This is your act of spiritual worship.

Again, we look to Christ, who is our living sacrifice. He sacrificed Himself, but He is the living Lord. Every other animal offered as a sacrifice died. But He is our *living* sacrifice. God raised Him from the dead on the third day so that He is never to die again. He has endured the pains, the sorrows, and the mockery and He continues to do so for you, and He has lived to tell the tale.

As those who are being made into living sacrifices, it's never pleasant to suffer, but we often find new life after we've faced hardships. A professor of mine said that we should thank the Lord for tough teachers who give lots of homework because it gives you a chance to grow and learn. I didn't appreciate the twenty-page paper he assigned me at the time, but I do in hindsight.

Confirmants and all Christian friends, know that life as a living sacrifice isn't an easy one, but a good one. It's a life we often fail at accomplishing, but it's one that Christ has completed for us perfectly. It can be one filled with mysteries, nights where we stay up late at night asking God, "Why?" It's a life that we live only by the great mercies of God, namely, by Jesus Christ, our living sacrifice, who sacrificed His life for us that we may live for Him. May God grant us the ability by the power of the Holy Spirit, to live out our Christian calling to live a life of sacrifice for others. Amen.