

Grace, mercy and peace are yours in abundance through faith in our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

¹ 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. ² 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.

³ For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you.

⁴ Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, ⁵ so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. ⁶ We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. If a man’s gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith. ⁷ If it is serving, let him serve; if it is teaching, let him teach; ⁸ if it is encouraging, let him encourage; if it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously; if it is leadership, let him govern diligently; if it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully. **This is God’s Word for God’s people.**

Dear Fellow Recipients of God’s Mercy,

How many of you like to play with Play-Doh? It’s fun to take it and make it into all different shapes. We can transform that lump of clay into a circle or square or into a ball or into a star and a lot of other things. The portion of scripture before us this morning talks about how God has transformed us into one of his children. He has given us spiritual life and he has given us all different gifts with which we can serve him and his people.

We are thankful that **“God’s Mercy Brings Us the gift of Life.”** As we study these words of the Apostle Paul, we’re going to see God brings us life so that **“We can be a Living Sacrifice”** and also God brings us life so that **“We can be part of the Body of Christ.”**

I. “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.” This section of scripture talks about how we, as children of God, are to live our lives as a living sacrifice. We are able to do that because of God’s mercy. It is God’s mercy that transforms or changes us. It is God’s mercy that renews our minds so that we can see the wisdom of salvation found in God’s Word. It’s God’s mercy that changes our attitude about sin and about God.

God has changed us or transformed us through the Means of Grace which is the Gospel in Word and Sacrament. For most of us this transformation happened when we were baptized. For some it came later in life as you heard God’s Word and the Holy Spirit transformed your heart through the Word. This transformation created faith in our hearts so that we could know and trust Jesus as our Savior.

This transformation reminds me of butterflies. This is the season when we start to see Monarch butterflies migrating south. A monarch butterfly starts out as a caterpillar – not very pretty but once they go into their cocoon they are transformed into this beautiful butterfly. We

start out as unbelievers – not too pretty but once we are transformed we are God’s beautiful children.

Paul tells us that since we are transformed we are to be living sacrifices. That is our spiritual act of worship. The Old Testament people began and ended their worship with a sacrifice. But Christ changed how we worship. We no longer need to make those animal sacrifices. We are to be more like Adam and Eve when they were in the Garden of Eden. Worshipping God by being obedient to his Word.

That means that we are no longer conforming to the pattern set by the world but rather to the pattern set by God’s Word. Paul in his letter to the Corinthians tells us, **“So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.”** (1 Corinthians 10:31). As we remember we were sinful and we were transformed because of God’s mercy, that helps us to serve and live as humble servants of God. Worshipping him every day with our lives.

It’s so easy to take worship for granted and to think worship is something we only do at church. It’s easy to fall into the trap of worshipping in a superficial way – not paying attention to the service; daydreaming; not really putting into practice what God’s Word tells us.

There are times when we ignore the what God’s Word tells us because we would rather follow the pattern of the world. But God in his mercy comes to us with his Word to guide us back onto the right path – the path of righteousness. God in his mercy assures us that our sins are forgiven – even the sins where we ignore the wisdom of God’s Word. He does all this so that we can be living sacrifices – living as members of his family – as members of the Body of Christ.

II. Everyone is different. We look different and have different likes and dislikes and yet when we work together we can accomplish many things. We see that whenever there is a natural disaster and people come together to help clean up – to help those affected. It doesn’t make any difference if you are an accountant or carpenter or cashier – it is different people coming together for a common purpose. As we think about that, it fits well with Paul’s description of the church as a body. A body has many different parts that serve different functions and yet they all come together for one purpose – life.

As members of the body of Christ we have different gifts and as we use these gifts we grow in our own faith and help to bring life to others by spreading the Gospel. Paul lists seven different areas but there are more than just the seven he listed. Let’s take a look at the areas he mentioned:

Prophecy - we might think this is predicting the future but prophesying is really proclaiming God’s message. That’s what the Old Testament prophets did and what we can still do. We can proclaim the message that Jesus is our Savior. That he died for our sins and that the main message of the Bible is faith alone in Christ alone brings us the forgiveness of sins, life and salvation.

Serving – being a humble servant to your fellow believers. Once again something we all can do. Teaching – on this Education Sunday we think of our Sunday School teachers. But teaching

is also done by coaches and day care providers and most importantly parents. Children look to their parents to teach them about so many things in life and God's Word is here to help all of us.

Encouraging – once again something that we all can do. Encourage each other and encourage our children and grandchildren. Encourage each other to remain faithful to God's Word and encourage each other to serve. Encourage each other when life gets challenging.

Contributing to the needs of others – sometimes we think only those with a lot of money can do this but if we all work together, even small contributions add up. The key is to do this motivated by the love of our Savior as we look to serve others with the blessings God has given us.

Leadership – this is an area that is more specific. Our leaders are urged to serve diligently. To be guided by God's Word as they lead and to use God's Word as they lead. We as part of the body of Christ will want to pray for our church leaders.

Showing mercy – not everyone has the gift to show empathy for a fellow believer. If you can console and show mercy, do it cheerfully recognizing that God will help us as we bring his comforting word to others.

We each have a spiritual gift and God wants us to use it as part of the body of Christ building each other up and sharing the gospel. Today we are celebrating Christian Education Sunday. It is very easy to say that the Sunday School teachers or the pastor are responsible for the spiritual welfare of our children, but Christian Education starts in the home.

You parents and grandparents are an example for your children. They watch to see just how important God's Word is in your lives. You are the ones that get your children to church and Sunday School. You are the ones that decide if you should have home devotions and pray together at home. It's not an easy job and we're not always comfortable doing this but God promises to help us.

We have the best resource to guide us as we do this. We have the Bible – God's Word. Read your Bibles and come to the various Bible Studies so that you can grow in your faith just as we want your children to grow in theirs. Take the opportunities God gives you be a healthy part of the body of Christ. As we begin our new session of Sunday School and Adult Bible Studies bring your children and join us so that we can grow together in faith.

God's Word has transformed us and brought us life. May these words of Paul encourage you to live your lives as a living sacrifice because you are part of the Body of Christ. Amen.