

“Giving Our All”

Romans 12:1-8 (Read prior to sermon)

Preached by Rev. Jane Moschenrose

Some of you might be shocked to hear this, but I have never been given an award for patience, or been accused of being patient. I *try* to be patient, and think I've grown some in that area over the years, but I'm still very impatient when it comes to certain things. The functioning of my body is one of those things. When something is wrong with my body, I expect it to heal twice as fast as normal, or at least not inconvenience me terribly with its inability or broken-ness. I also don't understand why God doesn't just ZAP me with complete healing - I mean what's the big deal? That would take no noticeable time or energy or effort on God's part, and it would enable me to be fully functional and do God's work in the world. Right?

And yet, here I am, at best 60% recovered from this knee replacement surgery 5 1/2 weeks post-op. Several people have told me that if I don't take the time now to rehab the knee I will never regain full functioning. The thought of having to take significant time out of each and every day to gain full functioning of this stupid leg irks me. But the physical therapist finally convinced me that doing so is my only hope for full recovery.

I'm glad no one heard the chat I had with God after THAT realization! But after I lamented and complained and fussed, I said, "OK, God, there's got to be something good that can come from this. I don't believe this is meant to be nothing but a meaningless, senseless aggravation in my life. So what do you have for me to learn in this time and situation? What do you want to teach me in this time of recovery?"

Since that conversation, when I'm doing the time-consuming recommended physical therapy, I've tried to pay attention to what God might be teaching me through what is going on in my body. And God has been merciful and full of grace in leading me to some amazing realizations. I've come to a better understanding of why it is so important that the people of God act as a well-functioning body, each part fully invested in doing what they are created to do. Only when all of the parts of the body function as they were created to work will the body run efficiently and effectively, to its full potential. When one part fails, the other parts suffer, and have to compensate for the absent or poorly functioning part.

For example, my left knee has been functioning poorly since a motorcycle accident 38 years ago. A diving accident a couple of years after that pretty much destroyed what was left of the joint, and 3 surgeries could not restore that knee to its original condition. So all these years my body has been compensating for that poorly functioning knee. I've got to give this body proper credit - it did a remarkable job. The way I kept the knee stable was by keeping the muscles that control the knee and leg as strong as possible. Over the years the muscles learned their role very well; they conformed to and compensated for the knee's weakness, missing cartilage, and ever-increasing deterioration. In the months prior to the knee replacement I dramatically increased my physical workouts to strengthen my left leg to its maximum capacity, to the point where sometimes the stress on my *right* knee caused that knee to hurt more than the knee that was to be replaced!

Turns out that my whole body compensated for the one damaged part over the years. My back and hips shifted a little out of their ideal position to try to help, and the other parts

sacrificed and adjusted to the needs of that injured knee as well. I am amazed at the effect one poorly functioning part of the body has on the rest of the body!

This experience has helped me to understand why Jesus compared the Body of believers with the physical body – there really are a lot of similarities. Think about it – what happens when one member of the body of faith stops functioning? When a member becomes weak or deteriorates, how does that affect the rest of us? How are we affected when a member is missing – when they stop functioning in the body of faith altogether? When a member stops carrying out their God-given role in the body, the body suffers, doesn't it. Either the ministry they are called to fulfill doesn't get done, or someone else who already is trying to carry out *their* God-given talent has to come alongside and do double duty. Well, I'll tell you, this leg situation has taught me that that doesn't work effectively long-term. Verses 5 and 6 state it well – "...we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another. We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us..." And if we fail to honor that grace God has given us, the whole body suffers, and cannot function as God intends. The body cannot successfully fulfill the mission God has called us to do.

Another lesson I've learned the painful way during this time of recovery is what happens when the old trusted member leaves and a new one moves in to take its place. The usefulness of my original knee was long past – no one would argue that point. And praise God, a new knee was available to take its place! This new knee is perfect; according to the surgeon, its potential for functioning is much greater than the original knee! The Dr. promised that I will be amazed at how much more I'll be able to do with this very fine new knee.

Well. It hasn't happened yet! During surgery my very strong muscles, which I had depended upon for getting me through each day, must have felt very insulted and disrespected. They were pulled and stretched and cut and bent and clamped out of the way while the new knee joint was being put in place. Their job description abruptly changed. Rather than being in charge of the leg, they are now to play a complementary, supportive role. And their reaction so far has been to scream, "***WHAT?!!*** What is happening here? What is that metal and plastic ***foreign body*** doing in here? We're supposed to work with ***that***?! Ah, we don't think so! That doctor may think that watchamacallit is the best thing since blood flowed, but we quite disagree! We didn't invite that to be part of us, it is not like us in any way shape or form, and we are not going to work with it! We will just stay rigid until things get back to normal."

Does that sound like anything you've heard among the body of faith? Change is hard. We don't like it. We try to ignore it, deny it, fight it and prevent it from happening. And diversity? Yes, the bible may say that God purposely made us diverse, each with our own role to play in the body, but practically speaking, we like homogeneity – we like others to be like us.

My hamstrings and quad muscles have complained the loudest. They apparently had a special relationship with the old knee; and because of this special relationship, because of the neediness of the knee, they thought very highly of themselves, perhaps higher than they ought, to use the language of verse 3 of today's lesson. The hamstrings in particular literally lost its place in my body when the knee was removed. When the therapist realized this, and pushed them into their proper position, they fought with all their might and caused maximum pain in their attempt to prevent more change. And since then, the therapist begins every session massaging the hamstrings, trying to get them to "release", as she says. Interesting phrase, isn't it? Makes me wonder. Is that how we act as members of the body of faith? Do you and I refuse to release – do

we hang tight, and refuse to function as God has called us to function – in order to keep those around us the same?

The hams don't work alone, though. No, the hamstrings have gotten together with the quad muscles. These two muscle groups take turns rebelling – when one set cooperates, the other resists. Do you ever do that? Do you talk to others, and get them to work with you to keep the body of faith functioning in a certain way? That way when one member starts to give in to the new way, the other member can act full force. When my hamstrings finally relented and started functioning better, my quads quickly came to its rescue by becoming rigidly tight. Does the same thing happen in the Body of faith? Have you ever heard someone say, “Oh, I'm not the primary one who feels that way – no, *others* don't want such and such change either! I'm just telling you what I'm hearing from *others!*”

Oh, all the members *mean* well. Their *intent* is good. The muscles are just at a loss because of all the recent change. They've not found their new place. They're uncertain about the reliability and longevity of the new knee. They thought they knew their place in the body and now all of that is in question.

That's normal for times of transition. That's why the Apostle Paul so urgently calls us to give ourselves totally over to God – as a living sacrifice. Now, to be honest with you I think this language is a bit strange. When I think of a “living sacrifice” I imagine something that, upon realizing where it is and what is about to happen, crawls *off* the altar! Really – would a living sacrifice *remain on the altar*? Are we really being requested to give up our lives, to sacrifice our lives? The King James Version says it this way: “I beseech you therefore that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, ***which is your reasonable service.***” Paul assumes that Christian faith is a *reasonable* and *real* life of practical service to God. For Paul Christian faith wasn't something to be practiced for the benefits that are derived from it; our faith is not to serve our own self-interests. We don't go to church because of what we get out of it. Rather, the Christian life is a call to selflessness, to Christ-likeness. The Christian life is one that strives first and foremost to glorify God and build up the body of Christ – that is, the body of believers. That body is made up of a diverse variety of complementary gifts and skills, and we are to assess our giftedness realistically and practice those gifts accordingly, for the benefit of the body and to the glory of God. When my quads go rigid, or my hamstrings are out of proper position or refuse to release, this is not sacrificial behavior, is it. These muscles aren't presenting themselves as living sacrifices for the good of the body as a whole. These muscles are acting out of self-preservation, of keeping things the same. But the kind of sacrificial service the Apostle Paul is referring to is not so much a “giving up” as a “giving to” or “turning over.” And that creates a different image in our minds. We are not asked to throw our lives into a fire to be burned, or to blow ourselves up to be martyrs. We are asked to give our lives to God – we turn our lives over to God. I like Peterson's translation that I read to the children – “Take your everyday, ordinary life – your sleeping, eating, going-to work, and walking-around life – and place it before God as an offering.” We say, “here I am, in my entirety, Lord. I am yours. Use me as you will, by your grace, mercy and power.” This kind of offering of ourselves leads to the kind of transformation that Paul is talking about. This kind of offering also leads to knowing the will of God and having the desire, and indeed the *passion* to follow the will of God.

Some of you may be thinking, “I don't know what part of the body God has called me to be,” or “I'm not sure what God's will is.” Well, I have good news for you today! As you release yourself over to God – as you give yourself to God, commit your life to God, God will make

clear to you what part you hold in the body of believers. God will make clear what gifts He is giving you to use to build up the body and glorify Him. And God's Will will become clear to you, as you walk according to His calling upon your life, day by day, as you fulfill the part of the body God is calling you to fill. And in so doing, we will find ourselves conforming to this world less and less, and being transformed into His likeness more and more. As we all carry out the roles God is calling us to be as part of the body of believers, this body will be one, effective and efficient in carrying out God's mission.

Isn't that what we want? Don't we want to be an effective part of the body of Christ, successfully and efficiently working to bring forth God's kingdom on earth? Let's pray that we may be clear about these things, and be effective as God's witnesses on earth, so that others may know He is Lord, and all may see Christ in us.

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