

"WHERE IS THE LAMB?"

Genesis 22:1-8
I John 2:1-2

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A mother overheard her daughter and son arguing about a doughnut left from breakfast. They did not want to split it and could not decide who should have it. In exasperation, her son finally blurted out, "One of us ought to act like a Christian about this; I think it should be you." Implicit in this statement is a definition of Christian behavior: a Christian looks out for the interests of others. A Christian is one who sacrifices for the sake of others.

There is truth to that statement. The church has always recognized those saints who sacrificed for the building of God's Kingdom. St. Francis of Assisi, the founder of the Franciscan Order, gave up the wealth of his family of orientation to live a life of "apostolic poverty." What about the most important sacrifice in human history, that of Christ our Lord. He gave himself that we might have life "and have it more abundantly." As followers of Jesus Christ, we, too, are called to sacrifice. In fact, our conscious obedience to God's will is a form of sacrifice.

However, the question comes to my mind and it is something I struggle with. Just how much do we sacrifice? To what degree do we give ourselves away for the service of God's Kingdom and others? This morning, I don't propose to have all the answers to this question. There are some observations I want to make.

I. EXCESSIVE SACRIFICE

The first observation is that I have noticed that some people sacrifice themselves to an excess. These persons over-give of themselves. They can't say no to a request from a child, the spouse or the church. To do so would make them feel very guilty. They seem to love others more than they love themselves. The Process Theologian, Daniel Day Williams, in his book, *The Spirit and the Forms of Love*, said that "Much of what appears to be self-giving love is really self-destruction."

A. Examples: The only way I know to illustrate this kind of sacrificial destructiveness is to just point to some examples.

1) I had an aunt we affectionately called Aunt Grace. She was a hard-working, sacrificial woman. For years, she would work in the local vegetable and fruit canning plant, just to pay the bills and put food on the table. During the peach seasons, she would work 10 and 12 hours a day, 6 and 7 days a week. Then she came home to cook and wash clothes for my Uncle Frank. Uncle Frank had different goals in life.

My uncle, and her husband, was a sawmill. He would begin work on Monday and by Wednesday, if he had made any money, he would quit sawing logs for the remainder of the week. Along with some of his friends, they would buy several gallons of moonshine and go fishing or party until Sunday or until the money ran out. Everyone in the family just knew that Uncle Frank would drink himself to death.

Fifteen years ago, my Aunt Grace died. She was sick, exhausted and burned out. Uncle Frank, since that time has retired and is still pickling himself with alcohol. Aunt Grace kept giving of herself in the hope that her husband would reform. She sacrificed herself for her marriage - for she felt that it was a sin to divorce.

2) At different times in our lives, we may be called upon to give beyond our limitations. When we become parents is one of those times. The other night I watched a program on teenage parents who tried to care for their baby, but after several months gave their child up for adoption. They recognized that giving up their child was best for them and their baby. The sacrifices of being a parent were too great and they are taxing. From the time you bring that little one home from the hospital until they go off into the night with the family car, and then go off to college, there are a lot of sleepless nights. Sleep and cash are what we sacrifice. It is sacrificial just to rise up on Sunday morning and get three kids and yourself ready for church.

Like Christ who loved the church and gave himself for it, most of you want to do what you can to support the ministries of this church. Everytime someone from the church calls to ask you to help serve a dinner, become a board or committee member, your immediate reply is one of joyous affirmation. You always say "yes" to that request. And incidentally, we know who you are. We keep a list of the sacrificial people. I am just kidding.

B. Jesus Christ: For those of us who are prone to give beyond our limitations, there is a theological fact that you should know. We are not Jesus Christ. God only sent one Lamb into the world to let us know of His love. I am not and you aren't God's sacrificial lamb. God calls us to be followers of Christ, not the Savior of the world. In fact, there are many institutions for the emotionally ill who have patients claiming to be Jesus Christ. That's the reason they are there.

II. SACRIFICIALLY UNDEVELOPED

Secondly, there is the other side of the coin to excessively giving of one's self. I have observed some who are "sacrificially undeveloped." Like teenage parents, they have a difficult time sacrificing for their child. They are in love with themselves. According to Wayne Oates, in his book, *Behind the Masks*, "The non-sacrificial person is "self-absorbed." They "use other people to indulge their desires." To expect such persons "to do favors in return is like expecting a person with no arms to shake hands with you." (Page 45)

A. Example: Remember the little boy in the introduction to the sermon. He felt he deserved that doughnut and he was not going to share with his sister. He felt his sister should sacrifice, not him.

1) There are, in this world, those who can't allow themselves to reflect the "weakness" of sacrifice or show love or kindness. But the same persons demand to be loved and cared for themselves. To notice this, just be observant in a restaurant. In a restaurant, a waiter or waitress is there to provide service. They are vulnerable because their tip depends on having a satisfied customer. Haven't you seen some waiter frantically trying to satisfy his customer. And I'll bet that some of you have a colleague or a friend you would rather stay home with and eat "grits," than have a delicious lunch together in a restaurant.

On two occasions, a fellow student at seminary invited me to a local pizza parlor for lunch. Both times, "King Henry the Eighth" kept the waitress running back and forth from our table. The pizza wasn't cooked enough, too much dressing on his salad and there was a spot on his fork. The only way you could see the spot was to hold the fork up toward the light. And, after inviting me to lunch, I was conned into paying for it.

2) Again, Dan Williams points out that, "Self Affirmation without self-giving is deadly." Particularly is this true when one who is self-giving marries another who takes instead of gives. In the February 26th issue of the *Wisconsin Magazine*, it carried the very tragic story of Judith Giwosky and her husband. Here was a husband who took; eventually taking his wife's life and his own. Now there are children without parents. Abraham was about to sacrifice his only son, when God stopped him. It would have been good if He could have stopped this sacrifice.

B. As Paul suggested, some of us need to present ourselves "as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God." When you see the ad in *The Congratationalists* asking for volunteers to serve a meal at St. Vincent's, some of us need to pick up the phone and call. Don't do like the minister this week who slithered and whined his way out of helping. When the church needs volunteers, find some way to serve, even if you have to sacrifice one weekend on the lake, or the golf outing. There are so many needs out there and in the church. It may be in your power to supply some of those needs. We help ourselves through helping others. As Thomas Murton wrote, "Sacrifice delivers us from our selfishness."

III. SACRIFICIAL LOVE

Well, we have observed the opposite poles of sacrifice. Those who give to the point that it becomes self-destructive and those who take, while requiring others to sacrifice. I believe as St. Augustine, that "Sacrifice, even though it is done or offered by man is something divine." (Page 192) But, we are back to our question, "To what degree do we engage in self-sacrifice?" Well, to be honest, I am still not truly certain. Yet, there is some insight we can understand from this observation.

A. First, sacrifice must be balanced with our own needs. The authors of the book, *The 36 Hour Day*, said that it is essential for us to find ways to care for ourselves so that we can be able to give our support and love to those who need it. You can give a cup of cool water in Christ's name only if you keep your own cup full.

B. Second, sacrifice should have a noble purpose. Christine Gudorf, in her article on sacrifice, said that "Self-sacrificing love is always aimed at the establishment of mutual love." The love my aunt had for my uncle was far from mutual. In fact, her sacrifice only encouraged my uncle's "unloving actions."

A noble sacrifice can promote mutual love. A Russian nun, imprisoned in a concentration camp, was deeply loved by prisoners and guards alike. One day, as a group of women were being led to the gas chamber, one began to cry hysterically. Without the guards seeing her, the nun took the young girl's place. When it was discovered, everyone was so distraught that German soldiers stopped the gassing for a time.

A parent's self-sacrificing love promotes mutual love. Serving a warm meal to a hungry man promotes mutual love. The sacrifice of our Lord brings people together who otherwise would be estranged because of social and language barriers.

CONCLUSION

It is inevitable that families, friends, husbands and wives experience some conflict. When there is a disagreement about where to go on vacation or who gets the last doughnut, just split it. Everyone can have the joy of sacrificing a little. Amen.