

Good morning, my name is Linda Potter and I am so glad to be with you all this morning. I want to thank Karla Roady for extending the invitation to join you in worship today. Karla and I go way back to when we shared in children's Christian education through out the diocese in the late 70's, long before I was ever ordained. Thank you Karla for staying connected.

I once read about a computer game for children called Zoombinis. The Zoombinis are a tribe of people and the point of the game is to move a group of them to a new homeland through a series of obstacles.

Apparently one of the most fun parts of the game comes right at the beginning: you get to create you own troop of 16 Zoombinis. They each come with a round blue body, BLUE KIND OF LIKE SMURF – IF YOU REMEMBER THE SMURFS any way the player gets the blue body and then gets to choose the hair, eyes, nose and feet, creating an innumerable number of creatures with whatever combinations are pleasing to you.

Have you ever thought about how much fun God must have had creating you? Have you considered how much it delighted God to choose all the different components that go into you? Oh yes, I know that we all have our genetics and heredity and some would say that our personality is some how hardwired into us. And in the beginning God created humankind and placed within each of us gifts, talents, ways of being that are uniquely our individual combination.

It is to this unique person that Jesus makes an appeal in today's reading from Paul's letter to the Romans. **"I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. "**

Paul in his letter to the Romans has spent the last few chapters exploring “core elements of God’s relationship with humanity, God’s perpetual call to life and human resistance and how we as humans can find our way back to a merciful God who always desires our return.

And thus an appeal....**to present ourselves our bodies as living sacrifices.** Paul never forgets that we are embodied creatures. Everything that we think, say or do we do in a body. Presenting means that we need to be aware that it is through our body we express our heart, soul and mind.

I find this exhortation a bit intimidating. I mean let’s face it when most of us look at our bodies we are reminded of our imperfections....at least I am. What does it mean to offer my somewhat pudgy body? A body scarred from surgeries, skin that is wrinkled with wear, limbs that might not do what they were intended to do or if they do it hurts?

So what does it mean to offer our bodies as living sacrifices to God especially when we consider the ancient sacrifices of the people of Israel who presented their animal sacrifices of thank offerings or sin offering in the temple in Jerusalem and those offerings were “perfect in every way”.

In the first century an act of worship often entailed the ritual slaughter of an animal. In today’s context it might be clearer to use the broader term “offering” rather than “sacrifice” Because of God’s abundant mercy to you, present your life as an offering to God.

I read something recently that really struck me and I think it fits here:

Do we need to go on a diet to please God?

Do we need to enroll in the gymnasium across the street to be an acceptable living sacrifice?

Do we need to have all our limbs attached and have everything in perfect working order to be "holy"?

What about those of us - who through no fault of our own - are a bit less than the super models that grace the pages of our fashion magazine? What about those of us who have been a bit careless during our life - and have been as a result - soaked, agitated, rinsed, and spun? Are we without hope? Are we unacceptable at the table of God's presence? At his holy altar?? Or among the angels and the saints that are gathered around him??

Clearly it is not some form of bodily perfection that matters to God.... Clearly this talk of responding to God's mercy by offering our bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God, must mean something much more than being able to meet some standard of good looks, health, and vitality that only a very few of us ever obtain.

So what's going on here – if it's not just about a "body" then what? What about the offering of our Spirit – what's the nature of our spiritual body? What's the shape of my/your spiritual body? Is it pure and unblemished? How is your spiritual body reacting to regular exercise and engagement in the routines of prayer, meditation, Bible study? When we look at our spiritual selves in the mirror what do we see?

To present our bodies to God as living sacrifices is, indeed, a spiritual act. To live lives dedicated to God's service, whether as clergy or laity, is genuine worship—the logical outcome of a decision to follow Christ.

What is it that we are offering to God. These metaphors of the human and spiritual body are just an attempt to help us have an understanding to what is being asked of us. And when we ponder what we have to offer – there's always the demon of competition lurking somewhere in the shadows. Oh, we say, I

simply can't do, be, think, invent, create.....as well as .....And that takes us down a rabbit hole that we simply can't abide.

My friends I think the message here is that God wants all of us. The places where we shine and the places that are faded, attributes of accomplishment and challenges of conduct, the test of holding back and the freedom of letting go. God receives every crevice of who we are and replies IT IS GOOD. IT IS VERY GOOD.

When we surrender all that we are and all that we have into God's care we are in fact responding to the mercies and love that God has so abundantly showered up on us.

Jesus' life and love model for us the complete offering of living sacrifice. Our offering, our sacrifice, our spiritual worship is a response to the life and love given freely on our behalf. That is what spiritual worship is all about: The offering of all we are -of everything - good and bad - perfect and imperfect - to God so that God can take it and do what God wills with it. So that God can accept it and transform it into what it was meant to be.

I think about all the living sacrifices, the faithful offerings that I have witnessed throughout my life –

A friend arriving with prayer book and bible in hand to pray during a difficult time

Someone stopping to help change a tire along the side of the road

A man sharing a \$10 bill with a stranger on the train

First responders helping rescue those in Lahaina

One who risks speaking out on behalf of those who have no voice

A child greeting an elderly man in a wheel chair with a smile and a hug

We all have opportunities to be that living offering of God's mercy and love to the world around us. And with each offering the world is changed.

Know that God delighted in creating you, and that God delights in you still, live into who you truly are. Uncover, recognize, recover your gifts and then use them with abandon to the glory of God.

I share with you a prayer as I close, written by a friend at Trinity Cathedral it is entitled: Lift Them Up It is her prayer. May it be our prayer as well.

**Today I prayed vs worried.**

**What a difference it made.**

**Praying for hearts full of  
love and a desire to serve.**

**Prayers for people to feel  
heard, respected, valued.**

**Lifting them up to God vs.  
worrying about stories  
that might happen or not.**

**I believe in God's love and grace.**

**We are His hands and feet.**

**I believe in people  
feeling heard, respected, valued.**

**May my prayers touch a web  
of people and actions  
that connects us all into a  
community of caring.**

Glory to God whose power, working in us, can do infinitely more than we can ask or imagine: Glory to him from generation to generation in the Church, and in Christ Jesus for ever and ever. Amen