

Romans 12:1-8, Matthew 28:16-20

So in preparing for today I was again reminded of the story of the young police officer who was taking his final exams at Hendon Police College in London. One of the questions he faced in that final was this - You are on patrol in outer London when an explosion occurs in a gas main in a nearby street. On investigation you find that a large hole has been blown in the footpath and there is an overturned van lying nearby. Inside the van there is a strong smell of alcohol. Both occupants - a man and a woman - are injured. You recognise the woman as the wife of your Divisional Inspector, who is at present away in the USA. A passing motorist stops to offer you assistance and you realise he is a man who is wanted for armed robbery. Suddenly a man runs out of a nearby house, shouting that his wife is expecting a baby and that the shock of the explosion has made the birth immanent. Another man is crying for help, having been blown into an adjacent canal by the explosion and he cannot swim. Bearing in mind the provisions of the Mental Health Act, describe in a few words what actions you would take.

The officer thought for a moment, picked up his pen and wrote, 'I would take off my uniform and mingle with the crowd'. And although in those extreme set of circumstances I'd have been right with him in that I think it flies in the face of what we hear the apostle Paul calling for us to be like in the reading from Romans because it would seem to me that what Paul calls for us to be and to do relates to us grasping onto the fact that we are called to be different, we are not to conform to the patterns of this world, not to allow ourselves to be pressed into the mould of the world, we are called to be those who have been renewed, those who have been transformed, those who are different.

But far too often I think that as Christians and as the church we have opted for the easy solution, we have worked out that it's so much easier to take off our Christian uniform and mingle with the crowds, far easier to be unrecognisable, unknown than to remain distinctive, different, far too easy to conform than to live in the reality of the transformed non conformity that Paul is calling us to here, and that we are saved for. And the result, well probably what we all face now that we live in a country where according to a report by Caroline Wyatt the BBC religious affairs correspondent last weekend we now live in a country where there are declining number of people who would call themselves Christians. Are we losing our religion she asks and then answers Yes. If there was ever a time when we need to take seriously that we are saved to be different and start living in the reality of it, its now.

But how do we do this - how do we live out every day the reality that we are saved to be different? And why do we do this?

a) HOW

It starts according to Paul with us offering our bodies as living sacrifices, it means we lay ourselves on the altar for God, all that we are, all that we have. This might seem a bit extreme, but please notice that this is all done only in the light of all that God has done for us, in view of God's mercy Paul says, in the light of all God has done, given and blessed you with offer yourselves, or as the message paraphrases it - take your everyday, ordinary life—your sleeping, eating, going-to-work, and walking-around life—and place it before God as an offering. Embracing what God does for you is the best thing you can do for him. This is what it means to be a living sacrifice, its no lightweight agreement after all sacrifices are usually dead for a start so there is this element of a complete break from what has been, a dying to what has gone before. And notice also that this offering isn't just a part of your life you feel ready to give to God is all, everything you are it involves your body and therefore has implications on what you do and don't do with your body. Are the things that you do with your body things that would bring praise and glory to God? It involves your eyes and ears the things you see and hear, the things you allow yourself to see and hear. What things are you watching

on TV via the internet, what are you reading? It involves your mouth the things you speak and say. This is a huge area within life and especially church life. It means no gossiping, no character assassinations dressed up as prayerful concern. It means that rather than verbally run down the people you have a problem with or don't like that you speak only words that might build up, encourage bring life. This sacrifice includes your hands what you use them for, helping being creative. It involves your minds, thoughts, ambitions, and dreams. It involves all that you have your money and assets, how you use them. What are you spending money on, how much money do you give away

I wonder how ready or able you might feel to do this today? For this is what Paul says is necessary for us to do if we are to make the very best of the rest of our lives, if we are to begin to grasp onto the reality of all that we are saved for. It's a very decisive break from all that has gone before, a deliberate action to break with the past and start afresh with God, allowing him to transform us, so that we are different, and It starts with us sacrificing all we are to God, for God as a response to all He has done for us.

This I believe strongly is an ongoing process, the problem with living sacrifices you see is that they can very readily get down from the altar, readily decide what they take with them to altar and what they'll decide to hold onto thank you very much. What Paul speaks of here is not half measures though its everything. I wonder how many of you like me find this hard, because there are some things you really struggle to let go of, some things you don't think you can so easily sacrifice, so easily come to God in all honesty and say I'm giving you this today, take it and use it as you alone see fit, I'm giving you charge over my finances I want to use them for your purposes alone from now on. Let's be honest this is no easy call but it's a vital one to hear if we as individuals and together as church are going to be what we are saved to be, transformed people living transformed lives different from the world around us, reflecting something of the incredible generosity and love of God to people.

#### b) WHY

And of course this really is why we do this, because at the very heart of God there is a desire that all people might not just know but also be able to experience His love for them. And one of the ways that people are drawn in to experience and hear about God's love is through those who've already experienced it and been transformed by it and are living out the reality of being a living sacrifice in their every day. This is exactly what we see in the OT when God calls a nation together to be His to live under His rule, to be different to the nations around and about them, to be living examples of what it means to be in relationship with God, with the clear aim that people might see, be drawn to God, through the different lives of those living differently in relationship with God.

We are saved to be different in a similar way, after all if there really is no difference between the ways in which we live, that we relate to others, spend our time and money, give of ourselves than those who have no knowledge of Jesus then tell me why should anyone ever really consider the need to get to know Jesus, to investigate the faith of those who call themselves Jesus followers?

Disciples it would seem to me from Jesus words in Mathew 28 make disciples. Jesus words to his disciples in Matthew 28 known as the Great Commission far too often today within our churches and our own lives have become more of a great omission. You see we've turned this powerful set of words from Jesus into a passion for getting bums on seats in church on a Sunday morning, after all it may help with the money needed to keep all the buildings going. It seems really clear here to me that Jesus is calling his disciples to make disciples not church members, and that discipleship is all about obedience, all about obeying all that Jesus taught and commanded. And that involves all of our lives all of our living not just the bits we choose.

We are saved and called by God to continue His mission, following in Jesus footsteps enabling others to see what an incredible difference knowing Him has made to our lives.

We are saved and called to Go – it means that the balls in our court, there's actions that are open for us to take in response to all that God has done for us in the life death and resurrection of Jesus.

Go into this world, as living sacrifices offered to God that He might transform you, renew you, that His power might be seen in and through you. Go into this world as living sacrifices that you might know you can never out give the one who gave of heavens best for you. Go into this world as living sacrifices and be different, offering those you meet with work with play with talk with the hope that things can be made new, transformed. Go into this world as living sacrifices so that other might come to know and see hear and experience the love of God for them.