

**SERMON PREACHED AT ST ANDREW'S WALKERVILLE ON SUNDAY OCTOBER 15,
2017 BY THE REVEREND STUART LANGSHAW, LOCUM TENENS.**

SIXTEENTH SERMON IN THE SERIES ABOUT HOLY COMMUNION

PRAYER OF SELF-OFFERING. Page 144 #31

If ever you have been in the situation where you have either wanted or needed to lose weight (I am told that there are a few people who don't have this want or need), you will know that you have to give up certain things. Because we have all done all the diets, I won't go into details. We **know** that we have to give things up ... or to put it another way ... if we want the benefit we have to make sacrifices. A sacrifice is the act of giving up some thing, especially to get or to do some thing else or to help someone else.

Today we come to the prayer at the end of the service of Holy Communion – the Prayer of self-offering. In our Prayer Book it's on page 144. Last Sunday Helen Gibson-White spoke about this whole section of the Communion Service called "The Sending Out Of God's People." This prayer of self-offering is a part of that whole section. In that prayer we use these words ... "we offer ourselves to you as a living sacrifice through Jesus Christ our Lord."

In the Old Testament, all the sacrifices that were offered became dead sacrifices. When a Jewish worshipper came to God, they brought a sheep or a goat or a bull or a pigeon, and gave it to the priests so it could be killed in a certain ritualistic way on the altar at the temple. There were different kinds of sacrifices, but at the heart of it was the understanding that sin demanded punishment – and the slain animal represented God's willingness to accept a substitute so that the worshipper might live, and have an ongoing relationship of forgiveness and joy with God. The Jews believed that God saw the sacrifice – and even more so, God saw the intention of the heart in offering that sacrifice, and God was pleased to accept those intentions and dead sacrifices. The sacrifices were made holy and effective because God accepted them. But for us ... we offer ourselves ... no animal or bird to represent us ... we offer ourselves. God sees the living sacrifice ... God sees the intention of our hearts ... and God is pleased to accept the intention and this living sacrifice.

Ourselves – body, mind and spirit.

Ourselves – hopes, dreams and ambitions.

Ourselves – work, recreation, volunteering.

Ourselves – service, pleasure and duty.

Ourselves – time, talents and abilities.

Ourselves – homes, church, other gatherings.

Ourselves – relationships, friendships, colleagueships.

To offer "ourselves", therefore, is a very large and significant offering. It is a very large and significant living sacrifice. The dead sacrifices were left at the Jewish temple to be consumed by the fire and for the benefit of the priests and their helpers. Our "living sacrifices" are not left behind here in Church ... they go with us wherever we go. The intention of our hearts goes with us out of our worship and into utterly everything we do during the week. The intention of our hearts is to represent God to the world ... to our family ... to represent God to our colleagues and friends ... to represent God in our work and recreation, to represent God in our pleasure and duty, to represent God in our hopes

and ambitions. God sees the living sacrifice ... God sees the intention of our hearts ... and God is pleased to accept this living sacrifice.

After all that we have seen as we have looked at the service of Holy Communion ... instruction, confession, absolution, publicly declaring what we believe, receiving the bread and wine with all that they mean to us ... after all that, we say to God, "Take what I am. Take all I have. Take all I can be. Take my strengths and weaknesses. Take my successes and failings." "Take my life, and let it be consecrated Lord to thee." Take the offering of my life as a living sacrifice.

Or there's another way we have of putting that same prayer. "Send us out, in the power of your Spirit, to live and work to your praise and glory." We don't simply leave church at the end of the service – we are "sent." Just as the first 12 disciples were given a mission by Christ, so too are we. Ours is to live and work to God's praise and glory."

"To live" to God's praise and glory. The every-day, common activities we have that make up what we do as we live ... these every-day things are done to God's praise and glory. Tidying the house ... shopping ... playing tennis or bridge ... meeting friends for coffee ... catching a bus. ... driving the car. Don't these things sound mundane and ordinary! Yet, they are what we do as we live to God's praise and glory. I really like hymn 347 by George Herbert in our Hymn Book. It begins, "Teach me, my God and king, in all things thee to see." And especially verses 3 and 4. "All may of thee partake:

nothing can be so mean,
which, with this tincture, 'For thy sake',
will not grow bright and clean.

A servant with this clause
makes drudgery divine:
who sweeps a room, as for thy laws,
makes that and the action fine."

"To work" to God's praise and glory. This refers to any of us who are employed. Our work is a part of our mission for God. In the office where we are, in the workshop or factory where we are, in the school where we are – we are there as people whose work is a gift from God, and whose work is our gift to God. It's difficult to get our head around the fact that the filing, or marking essays, or storing stock on shelves can be activities of God's mission. But they are – and as we relate to fellow workers in our places of employment so we can show by our lives the love and the grace of God.

"To work" to God's praise and glory also encompasses the things we do intentionally and purposefully to draw people's attention to God. It could be work here in the parish. It could be work in our volunteering. But we are called upon to "work" so that the love of God and the power of the gospel can be seen in the world where we are placed.

This Prayer of Self-Offering has merely 6 lines ... but they are 6 lines that bristle with meaning and reverberate with purpose. As we come to this prayer at the end of today's Holy Communion, and at the end of each service of Holy Communion, may this prayer of 6 lines be our purposeful, voluntary and dedicated dedication of ourselves to God, who gives himself to us in so many ways in this service of Holy Communion.