

St. David's Presbyterian Church
St. John's, NL
"Called to Sacrifice"
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One of the most central themes of Christianity and Judaism and at the core of their spiritual identity is the experience and benefits of "sacrifice." From the dawn of humanity, individuals have been called to sacrifice. It is true in war. It is true in many religions. It is true in family and other relationships.

Sacrifice is often viewed today as something archaic and primitive. Many think it is something that we might better leave behind in the ancient world. Yet as we consider why it is essential to the faith, let us also consider why it is essential to human experience.

Individuals and communities are called to sacrifice their time to help their most vulnerable. Every parent knows how much time, energy and personal resources of all kinds it takes to make their child the best person they could be. A parent who sacrifices little, but only looks to their own needs, often passes such self-centeredness on to the next generation.

Many teachers give of their time beyond what they are paid for, and professors as well. Business owners often are called to work many hours beyond what they had imagined to make the business thrive.

Doctors often have very little personal life, being on call and caring, having a shorter life expectancy. Ministers too give much of their lives to their work. Military personnel put their lives on the line for what they do. And I am sure there are many other occupations where people sacrifice their time, their energy, their life for the cause that stirs them within.

Many give up money, power, esteem, and fame for serving others quietly. This is a critical issue in Christianity.

Sacrifice is at the heart of the message of Good Friday, Easter, Christmas and every other major festival within Christianity. God could have stayed aloof and done nothing but complain about how humanity turned out. God took a pro-active stance in sending Jesus, to teach us, to be the substitute for us as we face the penalty of our sins.

I know the notion of being accountable as human beings for the sins and iniquities that we commit is not a popular notion today. The more popular way of looking at human beings is to simply say we are basically good and a few of us have gone wrong, rather than the Biblical view, that all have gone wrong and all are under the condemnation of our sins. The Biblical story further tells us that we cannot extricate ourselves from the guilt and weight of our rebellion against God. This is why Jesus' substitutionary sacrifice on our behalf is so crucial to human history. This is why this truth is of utmost importance to us personally. Why? Because we need to be freed from the penalty and curse of our sins. They weigh us down and kill us within in terms of what God wants to do for us and our families. We need to be changed to even want to do righteousness and be righteous, that is, what is best in God's eyes for humanity, ourselves and the world.

We need to be agents of change in a decaying world. This is not change for change's sake. This is change in light of what the Creator is calling us to be and to do.

We cannot save ourselves. Jesus has done this for us. We can say "yes" to what Jesus has done and to Jesus himself as the leader of this new transformational group. If our N. American culture chooses another way, the Lord will find many followers in many other parts of the world as he has already done.

So while we are not called to be the sacrifice for our own sins, that is Jesus' work, we are still called to sacrifice. We are called to sacrifice our time, many of our selfish desires, our money, our reputation, our visions and dreams to God's work, will, desires and vision. I cannot tell you exactly what that looks like in your life. I can tell you that it may be very different from what you had in mind without consulting the Lord, without consulting the Scriptures, without any desire to include God in your life plans.

It does mean giving our children to God. It means teaching them Christ's way. Abraham didn't want to give up his child. His Isaac was a miracle child born very late in Abraham and Sarah's life. He was the carrier of all the promises of God for his family and indeed all the nations of the earth. He was the focal point of all God's promises. So when God called Abraham to give him up, Abraham still knew that this is the God who could raise him to life, the God who would fulfill his promise, the God who is faithful. So he gave up his son. And God saw in Abraham's heart the same heart he had

in giving up his only son Jesus. This was true sacrifice. Just as we give our children to the Lord in baptism, as we lead them into the faith and trust in Jesus that we have. So we give them up to the Lord. And that sacrifice is not easy. Many of us have seen our children go through much that we wish we could have spared them the experience. But we cannot. So we give them to the Lord in prayer, talk to them about our own relationship to God. Lead them back to the Scriptures which lead us to life and the best principles in life.

All these things are sacrifice. It's more than the sleep you lose when your children are young. It's more than the worry you have for them as you want their best. It's more than the love you feel in your heart overflowing at times because they are simply yours. It is a life condition we accept as parents. I think many of us happily accept this sacrifice, although it is not easy.

David was much more up and down in his faith life, his trust in God. He often, as in Psalm 13, seems to be wondering if God has forgotten about him or at least wondering what's going on, while Abraham seems so strong in his faith (but not always, remember when Abram was lying to protect his wife?). We go through our doubts and disbelief, but underneath this must be the solid rock foundation of trust in Jesus. If we are unsure at this point, we must make it a priority in our lives to gain such assurance, talking to others who have such assurance, researching what is holding us back.

Most of us wonder what God requires of us. But first comes the desire to even want to serve him, to publically not be ashamed to say God is my God, Jesus is my Lord. Bernice will do that in a few moments. Others of you have done this over the years here at some point, or in some other church sometime in your lives.

The sacrifice begins with words and continues with words and actions. Sometimes we wonder if we will be faithful to trust God throughout the rest of our lives. We wonder, I wonder, if I will follow no matter what. Even through the most difficult of health circumstances, we are confronted with whether we will trust the Lord through the pain and the difficulties. But when this becomes overwhelming, I remember the Lord saying, "Just trust me today. Let tomorrow take care of itself."

Each of us needs anew to pledge ourselves, our families, our relationships, our friendships, our neighbors, our fellow citizens, pledge them all anew to the Lord. He knows how to guide us through this particular time in history, with all its challenges and craziness. He knows how to guide us through the darkest areas of our own lives, even we have doubts as to how we will get through them. If you need that support; if you need someone to help you get through what you are going through. Please call me or one of the elders to make sure you are not alone in what you face.

Let us trust Jesus anew. It is what we can do.

Let us pray.