

Come with me to Romans chapter 12. The Apostle Paul has spent eleven chapters tracing God’s saving work—His mercy to Israel, His mercy to the Gentiles, His mercy to the whole world—and now he simply has to stop and worship. It’s as if Paul reaches the summit of a mountain and realizes the view is bigger than his words. *“Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God!”*

But Paul doesn’t stay on the mountaintop. He moves immediately from worship to daily life. From awe to action. From God’s mercy to our calling. And that’s what we’re doing today as we honor our volunteers—the people who take God’s mercy and turn it into service.

Paul writes, *“I appeal to you... present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.”*

Notice what he does here. He takes worship out of the sanctuary and places it into the everyday. Worship happens in this sacred space, yes. But it also happens in the parking lot, the kitchen, the nursery, the music room, the council meeting, at Trinity downtown, when the prayer request comes through and people stop what they’re doing. Paul is talking about a devotional life; a daily life that is devotional. Worshipful. This kind of worship is rooted in mercy. It’s a response to God’s loving-kindness. It’s not driven by guilt or obligation. God’s mercy moves us to serve.

I think of a story from a small-town volunteer fire department. A reporter once asked a firefighter, “Why do you volunteer? You don’t get paid. You risk your life. You give up evenings, weekends, holidays.” The firefighter shrugged and said, “Because someone showed up for me once. And now I show up for others.”

That’s Romans 12. God showed up for us. Now we show up for others.

Paul continues: *“Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind.”* The world says: “Protect your time.” “Guard your comfort.” “Make sure you get credit.” “Do only what benefits you.” But the Spirit renews our minds so we begin to think differently: “How can I bless someone today?” “Where can I serve?” “How can I use what God has given me?”

Volunteers are living examples of this transformation. They choose service over convenience. They choose generosity over self-preservation. They choose the good of the Body over the comfort of the individual. And that brings us to Paul’s central image.

Paul writes, *“For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function... so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another.”*

This is one of the most beautiful images in Scripture. The Church is not a club or a corporation or a collection of unrelated individuals who happen to sit near each other on Sunday.

We are a body. Connected. Interdependent. Needed. And Paul is clear: every member matters, even the ones that may feel less important.

Years ago, a pastor visited a man who had stopped attending church. The man said, “Pastor, I don’t think anyone will notice I’m gone. I don’t do much.” The pastor didn’t argue. He simply walked over to the fireplace, took a burning coal out with the tongs, and set it on the hearth. They sat in silence as the coal slowly dimmed, cooled, and turned gray. The pastor left the house. The man he visited was back the next Sunday.

Every member matters. Every gift matters. Every act of service matters.

Paul lists several gifts—prophecy, service, teaching, exhortation, generosity, leadership, mercy. Then he says, very directly: If your gift is serving—serve. If your gift is teaching—teach. If your gift is generosity—give. If your gift is mercy—show mercy. If your gift is leadership—lead with humility. In other words: use what God has given you.

I once heard someone describe the church like a symphony orchestra. The violins may carry the melody, but without the cellos, the flutes, the percussion, the brass, the whole thing collapses. And even the triangle—played at just the right moment—can make the entire piece shimmer.

The Body of Christ is like that. Every gift adds beauty. Every volunteer adds strength. Every act of service adds harmony to a song that sings of Christ; a song for the world to hear.

Today we honor those who serve in this Body—those who give their time, their energy, their creativity, their compassion. Some of you serve publicly. Some quietly. Some weekly. Some occasionally. Some in ways that are seen. Some in ways that are hidden. But all of you serve Christ. All of you strengthen His Body. All of you reflect His mercy. And we thank God for you. Your service is not small. It is not unnoticed. It is not insignificant. It is worship. It is sacrifice. It is the Body of Christ building itself up in love. And it is this Body that moves out into the world with the offer of new life, living out and speaking the message of repentance leading to the forgiveness of sins in Jesus’ Name.

Paul ends this section of Romans by reminding us that everything begins with God’s mercy. We serve because Christ served us first. We give because Christ gave Himself for us. We love because Christ loved us to the cross. Jesus sacrificed everything to reconcile us to God. Now we say “thank you” with our sacrifices. We take our places in the Body of Christ and do Christ-like things. How could we not?

Let us pray: “Lord, continue to renew our minds. Continue to shape our hearts. Continue to strengthen Your Body. With You as our Head, we step out to serve the world.”

