

Romans 12:1-8 15th Sunday after Pentecost September 12, 1993

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. 2Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect. 3For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of yourself more highly than you ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned. 4For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, 5so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another. 6We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us: prophecy, in proportion to faith; 7ministry, in ministering; the teacher, in teaching; 8the exhorter, in exhortation; the giver, in generosity; the leader, in diligence; the compassionate, in cheerfulness.

I want to tell you about a privilege that I have been given. It is the privilege to be good for nothing. To be good...for nothing.

For me that privilege is most real for me as I serve on the board of LAOS - Lutheran Agencies Organized in Service. I receive no pay for serving, no boost for my career - at the end of each year I am free to walk away and serve no longer. Yes, on that board I can be good, or more accurately do good, with no other return but the joy of knowing people will be helped through what I do.

Most of you as you serve in the church are just like me - good for nothing - or when you help you neighbor or the stranger in need - or when you give to the poor - all are done for the joy of being good.... for nothing.

The world says, "No one is good for nothing. Everyone has an angle, is seeking some advantage for herself, or himself." And maybe the joy we experience when we teach a child, giving our time and caring for free is a self-interested reward. But I hope every teacher will be able to forget self, if only for a moment and be good.... for nothing. For in Christ God invites every one of you teachers to do and be just that - to do good, and be good..... for nothing.

And not just teachers but each and every one, using the gifts God has given. "...the teacher in teaching, the giver in generosity, the leader in diligence, the compassionate in cheerfulness." Each being good, doing good... for nothing - no reward, no keeping track.

Everything God has done in Christ makes this possible. In Christ you are named a child of God. In Christ you are promised the highest reward, in Christ God has given God's eternal love to you. In Christ God has even promised to forget and forgive your every sin and failing.

So you are free, each and every one of you, to be good... for nothing.

You are free to take your own time and to give it to the suffering.

You are free to take your own love, and to share that love with those who are battered and bruised by life, or of a different social class, or race or age than you.

You are free to take your money and share it – to give that others might give thanks to God.

You are free to take your time and skills and to direct things that need to be done in the church or at school, or in your neighborhood.

You are free to do all of that as a gift - to be good for nothing.

Paul writes: “I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sister, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God - what is good and acceptable and perfect.”

Paul writes these words, after he has told the Romans all about Jesus Christ and the gift of salvation. Then he calls them and us to a renewing of our minds. Being conformed to the world is to ask, "What's in it for me? Being transformed is to be good... for nothing - for free.

So where do we go wrong? Why do we so often bury those gifts of God in fear?

We learn that when we are good... for nothing there is a catch: we lose our freedom.

We say yes to serving in the church and we have lost some freedom. Whether we feel like it or not, there will be a meeting to attend - phone calls to make - information to gather.

Those who teach will need to prepare. They will need to get in at a decent hour on Saturday night. They will not be free to be gone on Sunday.

Those who sing in the choir will lose freedom over their Wednesday nights. They will be expected to be here a couple of Sundays a month.

Those who give financially will have less for themselves, they will find that there are always more need, more that they are asked to give.

There is only one reason to be good... for nothing: Love - love for God and love for others.

Jesus spoke truth us about all of this: “Those who want to save their life will lose it and those who lose their life for my sake will find it.”

This makes no sense, except for those who are in love.

Like Jesus is in love with you, and gave his life, and was raised to new life. Like you who are in love with Jesus and are good... for nothing.

For free.