

Romans 12:1-8

Does Our Worship Have Hands and Feet?

April 30, 2017-Faith in Action Sunday

**12** I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters,<sup>[a]</sup> by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual<sup>[b]</sup> worship. <sup>2</sup> Do not be conformed to this world,<sup>[c]</sup> 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.<sup>[d]</sup>

<sup>3</sup> For 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. <sup>4</sup> For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, <sup>5</sup> so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another. <sup>6</sup> We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us: prophecy, in proportion to faith; <sup>7</sup> ministry, in ministering; the teacher, in teaching; <sup>8</sup> the exhorter, in exhortation; the giver, in generosity; the leader, in diligence; the compassionate, in cheerfulness.

This week, as I was thinking about a sermon title, it occurred to me that I make the process of finding a title too hard and I spend too much time on it. In my mind, I am searching for the perfect sound bite...the phrase that will give you a clue about the topic, but also entice you to want to listen. In this digital world in which we live, we are bombarded every day with sound bites, begging for our attention. Some are in the form of news headlines, others from advertisers, and maybe even a few from our own homes.

Here are a couple I ran across this week:

From a young mother, "Cleaning a house with a toddler is a little like brushing your teeth while eating Oreos."

Sheryl Sandberg, Chief Operating Officer of Facebook said, “Men still run the world. I’m not sure that’s going well.”

And from the Becker house, “Turn it to the right and pull.” We have a door knob that makes exiting our patio door quite the feat. By the way, turning the knob to the right and pulling does not guarantee the door will open.

Twitter is the perfect place for sound bites. Twitter limits the number of characters a person can Tweet at once. So, it’s important to be short and to the point. Here are a couple of Tweets I saw this week:

“If you're feeling too good about yourself, go ask a 5yr. old to guess your age. That should even things out.”

“Phones have become so expensive that if you fall and hear a cracking sound you pray that it was your leg.”

Anyone who has ever been interviewed by a newspaper or TV reporter can tell you that reporters have a way of lifting out the single worst soundbite of the interview and using that in the story. I was once interviewed at length, by the local TV station about the Westside Block Party that our church hosted. The reporter talked to me on camera for about 10 minutes. That night, on the news, the part of the interview the station showed was me saying, “We just want the kids to have a great time.” Nothing about the more than 1000 school kits we gave away or our desire to be good neighbors, to give kids a fresh start, to cooperate with other churches...nothing.

That sound bite, “We just want the kids to have a good time,” became a sound bite at the church when we experienced breakdowns in communication. Someone in the office would utter...“We just want the kids to have a good time.”

Today’s sermon title, “Does Our Worship Have Hands and Feet?” is a line from a song called, “Fade with Our Voices,” by Jason Gray. I chose this sound bite from the song, because like the song, our scripture today addresses what practicing our faith ought to be about. Although,

if Paul had been asked to choose a soundbite, it might have been a little lengthier, like, “Does our worship have hands and feet, and eyes and ears? Do our whole lives reflect our faith in God and God’s ways? Paul suggests that one’s whole life---body and mind---must become an expression of devotion to God. In offering our lives as “living sacrifices”, we are not dying to please God, but turning ourselves over to God’s purposes so we become fully alive. We become who we were created to be by seeking God’s ways with our whole selves. This passage goes on to describe what that looks like, urging Christians to live in ways that build up and honor the body of Christ, because we are members of one another, all of us depending on the well-being of each other.

The metaphor of all Christians as the “body of Christ” works because of the necessary connectedness of the parts of the body. What affects part of the body, affects all of the body. Ask anyone who lives with chronic pain and they will fully explain how this works. When one thing hurts...every part of the body feels bad. The body metaphor works for individual churches within the body of Christ. What affects one of us, affects all of us. This is why it is so important that we take seriously the idea of covenant with one another, as members of Disciples Christian Church.

When we join the church, we don’t sign a contract or pinky swear that we will do certain things, but instead, we enter into a sacred covenant with the other members of the church and with God. Covenant is more than a piece paper, it is a special relationship. In Hebrew Bible terms, a covenant is a holy agreement in which the parties are bound together by a common promise or promises. When we join the church, we make a promise to the other members of the church, and to God, to support the mission of the church, knowing that each of us is important and brings different gifts to this manifestation of the body of Christ.

This covenantal relationship doesn't allow us to get mad and run away, dig our heels in until we get what we want, think too highly of ourselves or think we aren't *good enough* to contribute. Everyone has gifts to contribute and everyone's gifts are needed. This way of thinking, this way of being in the world is counter cultural. We live in a world where the idea of anything being permanent is almost comical. We act as if other people, and maybe even God, are ours to consume. That's not how covenant works.

Covenant says, "No matter what, I will fulfill my promises." The promise we make when we join a church is that we will support what the church is about...we will support it financially and with our time and talents. We don't all have the same capacity to give when it comes to monetary giving, but we can all promise to give sacrificially, at whatever level that means for each of us. We aren't all in the same place spiritually, but we can commit to growing personally and as part of this community. We aren't all able to physically do the same things, but we can all promise to do the things we can. The work of the church is big, important work, worth believing in, and it requires all of us.

I'm rethinking what I ask people when they join the church. I usually ask, "Do you come forward today, proclaiming God as Creator of the world, seeking to follow the ways of Jesus, and desiring to join this faith community?" What would it be like to add, "And is it your desire to enter into covenant with the other members of this church and God, promising to support and work toward fulfilling the mission of the church through our core values of hospitality, spiritual growth and justice through service?" What if I asked the congregation to respond to the new member by reaffirming their end of the covenant? "Do you, members of Disciples Christian Church, promise to, alongside our new member, support and work toward fulfilling the mission of the church through our core values of hospitality, spiritual growth and justice through service?"

This opportunity to reaffirm our commitment to the covenant of membership might serve as a reminder to all of us that we must keep the vision of who or what we are meant to be before us. You see, all over the world, experiencing threats to its survival, in the face of declining membership, resources, and influence, the church has forgotten who it was meant to be. The church is meant to be a courageous, nonconformist community of believers who are charged with carrying light to darkness and hope to a world that is lost. And this charge is going to take all of us working together, bound together around the promises we have made to each other and to God to care so deeply about transforming the world that nothing else matters.

Today we remind ourselves that every act of love, kindness, or compassion we do, is worship. Our whole lives, have the potential to be worship if we will give ourselves as living sacrifices to the One who loved us into existence and who binds us together in covenantal love and the promise that together we have the power to bring about transformation.

Our worship must have eyes to see the suffering of the most vulnerable. Our worship must have ears to hear one another's stories. Our worship must have feet to take us where we are needed. And our worship must have hands to heal and protect and create. Today we use our hands to protect the children in our community from the pain of empty stomachs and the damage of malnutrition. This work that we will do together is worship.

"Every bit of love we share is worship."

How's that for a soundbite? Let us worship God together!

Amen.

