

# “Sacrificial Friends”

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John 15:12-17*

Sacrifice...

What is conjuring in your mind, your heart?

Sacrifice...

Back on September 11, 2001, the men and women of Flight 93 made a decision to sacrifice their lives, to save the lives of others. They did not know those they were going to save, but there was an internal recognition, identity, perhaps devotion to stop those murderers from destroying not only other lives, but a great symbol of freedom and equality – The White House.

Thirty-two minutes... that’s how long this horror and ensuing sacrifice lasted. Thirty-two minutes – “We must stop them – with our lives!!”

As many lovingly spoke their last words to families over cell phones, sacrifice was decided.

Gregg Easterbrook, writer for “The New Republic” penned these words;

It would have been easier for the passengers of Flight 93 to do nothing but cower and pray in the back until the plane plowed levelly into the White House and their lives ended painlessly in a millisecond. Instead they chose the hard, awful way because that is what morality demanded.

Sacrifice...

Staff Sgt. Brian Craig, serving in Afghanistan and Iran wrote to his father back in Texas. Brian earlier had lost his faith, but then regained it. He shared; “I think that the guys I work with know that I am different. I just pray that I make a difference in their lives. I pray that I am a good example of a man of Christ.”

This was his last letter home. Sgt Craig volunteered for a dangerous mission that was threatening both U.S. Troops and innocent Afghans. He was killed when a bomb exploded in front of him.

Sacrifice...saving lives from brutality and from murder.

Of course there is the other side of sacrifice. When evil walks among innocents, kills and maims. Where morality is turned upside down. Where religion is skewed to terrorize and destroy.

- Where humans are sacrificed by suicide murderers, and too many call the murderers martyrs!

Recall in antiquity sacrifice was seen as a way, the way to appease the gods. The gods were selfish, demanding and fickle. The best of your crops, of your herd, even of your family were needed to calm the appetite of the Deity.

Sacrifice became the order of the day. Sacrifice what is most beloved! It started with grain, animals, then to humans! From the ancient Middle East to the Aztecs of North America, to the Ancient Hindus – “precious things” were sacrificed!

Recall the almost sacrifice of Isaac, Abraham and Sarah’s child. Times were a changing! Ethical monotheism was gaining strength, but had a ways to go.

At the heart of our faith, Christianity, Jesus Christ is our sacrifice. From the ancient world of Judaism and neighboring traditions, we Christians saw his crucifixion as the end of all sacrifices, human and animal, to appease this now Ethical God, who demands “sin” to be eradicated. There was another way!

John’s Gospel sees Jesus as the Lamb of God. The sacrifice for all. This reflects the Jewish Passover. Now, of course there is much, much more here than I can share this morning, but please hear this: By Christianity positing Christ as the sacrifice for all, the Christian ethos could (should) never repeat the bloody horror of the cross. Theologians have and continue to debate the cross of Christ, but none wish to enlarge it to include more.

What has transpired is the deep-seated conviction within our faith that sacrificing for others is and should be normative for us to live faithful lives.

Christ is our example. We have adjusted this sacrifice – to where our lives are to be sacrificed for others.

Of course Judaism came to understand that in terms of true sacrifice, God wants a “broken spirit”, an open heart to the needs around him/her, as the Psalm declares. Paul declares in Romans 12:1, You - “Present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God.”

Most of us will never be thrown into a situation where our sacrifice will lead to our deaths. Thank God there are those who, when such a decision for love and justice arises, they are firm in their sacrifice!!

But, we humans are called to sacrifice for others! This is so integral to our faith! Yes, even in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

No, I am not worried about a vengeful, wrathful deity. No, sacrifice is not to appease God, but instead sacrifice pleases our inward relational natures.

Christ’s command to his friends “Love one another!”

Sacrificial friends!

Hebrews 13:16 “Do not neglect to do good, and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God.”

This season of Lent is a time to reflect on our lives, on how it’s going, this being “a living sacrifice.”

How is it going?

What sacrifices have flowed from you? And they come in all sizes and intensities.

For example; Paul was in prison at Philippi in the 50's of the Common Era. Why? He wouldn't shut up about this Jesus fellow who was changing the world, who was speaking of freedom in Christ. Let me tell you, to speak of freedom, when under the thumb of an oppressor is a sure way to get into trouble, to say the least. He writes: "I have received full payment, and more. I am filled, having received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent me, a fragrant offering, a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God."

There were those in Paul's time, and during his plight that knew of sacrifice, and its necessity. They sent "gifts", probably food, clothing, maybe some writings, perhaps some sweets.

I dare say, that most of us know little of sacrifice. Due to social and economic progress levels of sacrifice have lowered. But, could it be we need a reminder that needs of all kinds remain; from just life sustaining to Soul and Spirit sustaining.

Sacrificial Friends.

We've come a long way from such brutality. We must never allow our values to be eclipsed to where such barbarity is acceptable once again. For God is Love, and we are Christ's friends, if we love and sacrifice for others. There is this other Human Sacrifice where we humans willingly sacrifice for others, to their benefit and our fulfillment.

"This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you...I have called you friends..."

Amen.