***Shiloh United Methodist Church***

Romans 12:1-4 Rev. Tyler Amundson May 16, 2021

***“Hello, are you listening now?”***

One of the great blessings in working in the church these last 10 years, has been to truly be in a space of multigenerational living. In most of our world we do not see all the generations, and through my work I have got to meet with young and old to discuss life, hear stories and express spiritual graces to one another.

As I speak with the traditional and baby boom generation, it is clear to me they share one fundamental experience. Technology and how we engage with one another as humans has changed dramatically in their lifetimes. In truth it has been their lifetime, but also the last 200 years. We have gone from horse and buggy pace, to locomotive pace, to telegraph pace, telephone pace, to radio pace, to TV pace, to internet pace, to cell phone pace, and finally todays smart device pace.

In the increasing pace change, one thing has remained true for all the generations, they value deeply the engagement of communication that involves a direct exchange, live or seemingly live engagement is preferable to send and wait. The phone revolutionized this for us because we could talk instantaneously across vast distances…even though at the beginning it would cost a lot.

Every once and a while when I am teaching someone to use technology I hear people say, “The phone, it was so much easier.” It was and is sometimes the easiest way to connect in the back and forth exchange that we all love, even with all the ways we have now.

One of my dearest friend's in my life, I cemented my friendship with, near a burning trash in the desert of Mexico. That's right, a friend that lived maybe a mile from my childhood home, it took us traveling to Mexico and standing next to the pit where they were burning garbage for us to become friends. Becoming friends is a funny thing. It takes a certain amount of exchange back and forth. Give and take, before the trust begins to settle in. Before you recognize you have a connection.

My friend Aaron and I met on a High School mission trip to serve in Tecate, Mexico. You probably know the place from the popular, but not good beer named after the town. One evening after a challenging day we met next to a trash pit with the sun setting on the Mexico dessert and began the exchange of our friendship.

Aaron is someone I still call to connect about life. He lives in Denver, and I in Montana, but he and I have no trouble picking up where we left off. Aaron was there to support me the day my oldest daughter Corinne was born, called me when Quincy was born, called me when my mom died, and connects with me when he knows I am in a tough spot. I called him and celebrated when his child was born, celebrated when he got married, saw his first child and hung out with her just before Covid hit last year. Aaron and I have supported one another, and exchange after exchange of our friendship seems to deepen our connection.

Aaron really doesn’t connect any other way, than chatting on the phone. And I love that Aaron and I have to connect in that medium, because we get to share life with each other each time we chat. It reminds me of those old Verizon commercials, “Can you hear me now?” Aaron and I hear each other when we chat, we share the sacred moments of life, and we listen to each other.

During the pandemic this last year, there is one crucial aspect of church life that I missed the most. It is the sacred part of being Methodist that means the most to me. It is so important that I asked Crystal to do it with me at our wedding. I missed serving communion.

Communion is a mighty meal for me in the church. As a pastor I love that I represent the tradition of the church, a living tradition reaching back to Paul and Peter, and other leaders like Lydia. Sharing a reminder that the common is sacred, just as Jesus showed in that final meal he shared. I love that the people coming forward in our tradition come with no pre-conceived need for understanding or level of penance, they come to the meal freely to be reminded of a love that forgives and embraces all. Most of all, I love the exchange of serving the bread and juice of looking into the eyes of people I love, some I might be struggling with, some I might be in an argument with, others I could be becoming friends with, and others who I do not even know. All of us get the meal of God’s love. All of us engage in the exchange of blessing and receiving the meal. A sacred exchange of relationship.

Communion, like my relationship with Aaron, grounds me into life and releases my spirit to soar. In the exchange I am reminded that I have a deep value to God, and the ones I share in the relationship with have deep value to me and even more to the God who loves me. Communion literally creates every time a new economy of value for the people around me, an economy that values the people in my life, creation itself, the way God values them with love.

Perhaps it is the common exchanges we have through things like communion and the deep exchanges we have with friends is the process through which God invites us to properly order our values in the world.

I had a professor in college, a dear friend and mentor who taught me two words that always reminds me the balance of how we value people in our world. Both words are Greek. One is Melea, please join me in saying, “Melea.” Melea means an irreplaceable part, like the limb of a body. Things that if lost will always impact us and how we live. The word is Merida, please join me in saying, “Merida.” It means replaceable parts. In other words, not vital things. A shoe is a replaceable thing or part, a piece of an engine is replaceable, and sometimes in our world we commodify even people as replaceable expendable.

In our scripture today, the holy and living sacrifice that Paul is breaking into here, is the valuing of people and parts of creation in God’s eyes. The value he is placing out there is that more often than not, we should know that God values all pieces of creation as Melea.

Here now all of Romans 12:

**A Living Sacrifice**

**12**Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. **2**Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.

**Humble Service in the Body of Christ**

**3**For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the faith God has distributed to each of you. **4**For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, **5**so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. **6**We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us. If your gift is prophesying, then prophesy in accordance with your[[a](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Romans%2012&version=NIV#fen-NIV-28252a)] faith; **7**if it is serving, then serve; if it is teaching, then teach; **8**if it is to encourage, then give encouragement; if it is giving, then give generously; if it is to lead,[[b](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Romans%2012&version=NIV#fen-NIV-28254b)] do it diligently; if it is to show mercy, do it cheerfully.

**Love in Action**

**9**Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. **10**Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves. **11**Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord. **12**Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction,faithful in prayer. **13**Share with the Lord’s people who are in need. Practice hospitality.

**14**Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. **15**Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn.**16**Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position.[[c](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Romans%2012&version=NIV#fen-NIV-28262c)] Do not be conceited.

**17**Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone. **18**If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. **19**Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God’s wrath, for it is written: “It is mine to avenge; I will repay,”[[d](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Romans%2012&version=NIV#fen-NIV-28265d)] says the Lord. **20**On the contrary:

“If your enemy is hungry, feed him;  
    if he is thirsty, give him something to drink.  
In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head.”[[e](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Romans%2012&version=NIV#fen-NIV-28266e)]

**21**Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

I think I understand now what people have meant when they say they miss just calling people on the phone. The rapidly changing level of communication means that we have actually found ways to commodify relationships. You are only worth a text, not a call. Companies have decided to only do exchanges via email or online chat, to the detriment of the interaction of a real person. The commodification of communication stems from another reality we face, and we must be careful of and that is the commodification of creation, those things irreplaceable in the body of God’s beloved kingdom.

During WWII, Britain was desperate to track the resources necessary to fight the war. Economists developed a method by which they tracked all commodities sold and bought. This seemingly simple calculation worked great to help Britain navigate the war and asked for what they needed to overcome their enemies.

As the world was emerging from the war, there was a need to value nations to decide where to send aid and support rebuilding. The simple calculation the Brits used seemed like a good idea, and mundane in its use. Many you know this calculation as the GDP, or gross domestic product of a nation.

While this calculation seemed mundane and even neutral, it is actually dangerous beyond measure. For value of a people and country is only measured in the amount of goods and commodities, bought and sold.

Imagine for a minute a woman in Somalia, who gets up early each day, journeys 2 miles to get water for her family, gets her children to school each day, cares for the sick and infirm in her community, feeds her children, and gets them safely to bed. In the GDP formula, she has no value. She has neither produced or sold any goods.

On the other hand her brother, who was lucky to be able to become a military pilot. Unfortunately, the nation is at war with another nation. When he dropped the bomb on a building, he is part of a commodity enterprise that involves the bomb makers, the aircraft maker, the emergency personnel who responded to the building, the process of burying the children, women and men who died, and the rebuilding of the building. And while no one person in this infrastructure is a bad person, the system itself that embodies an awful evil, and the value to the GDP of this act is gigantic. [[1]](#footnote-1)

Our exchanges matter. Paul is pointing this out to us today. And there are some holy exchanges we engage in each day, that re-purpose our value into one that is God’s kingdom. However, there are others that value creation very differently and while appearing neutral may in fact be very opposite of God’s value of love.

We are called to value all of creation as a part of God’s sacred body, and live with our bodies likewise. To engage in exchanges that reorder the world into God’s economy.

Over the past several weeks, I hope you have learned how the liturgy of your everyday lives does this very act. It brings God’s economy to the forefront of our world.

If I was going to rewrite that old Verizon commercial for God’s economy, the person walking around would be saying, what I think God is saying to us, “Hello, are you listening now?”

May we, as we move ahead in our lives, listen to where we can help to make people and creation more what God asks of us, the parts of the body, the irreplaceable parts of creation. It is sacred work to engage in the exchanges that remind us of this, I do it every time I call Aaron, and we do it every time we share communion.

1. Muller, W. (1999). *Sabbath: restoring the sacred rhythm of rest*. Bantam Books.  [↑](#footnote-ref-1)