

August 31st, 2025 Sermon

Scripture Intro:

Over the past year, we've had the opportunity to take a journey through some of the most powerful and important pieces of God's story through the Bible. Some have been very quick overviews, and others we've had a chance to stay in for a while.

We began right in the very beginning in Genesis, where God creates all things good, and gives them into our care, through the ups and downs of Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebekah, Jacob and Rachel, Joseph, Moses and many others, we saw how the world that had been broken and scarred through hatred, envy, and pride.

Then we prepared and waited for the chosen Messiah sent by God to change and renew us and our world. Advent, the season around Christmas, means something like arrival. It's a time of waiting and preparing for Jesus, and remembering how he has already come to be with us.

So we then explored the birth, early years and ministry of Jesus, listened to many of his parables, mourned and celebrated during the Easter season as we walked alongside in his death, resurrection, and raising to God.

That brought us to the book of Acts, where we saw how Jesus sent the Holy Spirit as he had promised, and how it renewed and empowered his people, and that's where we have spent the last couple months.

Now, we're going to speed back up again, taking a brief look at most of the remaining books in the New Testament before celebrating Advent again this year, and we're going to start with Romans, which is the next book in the scriptures after the book of Acts. The printed sermons that are available at the back also have a calendar with the scriptures we will be covering each week if you would like to be able to see where we will be spending some time, and read around to get the context.

Another great way to get more out of our readings each week is to join us for Bible Study, which takes place every Wednesday morning with fellowship, coffee, and snacks at 10am, and the study beginning at 10:30. We have people joining us who are five months old, and others who are Ninety-two, and everything in between. It's a relaxed, open space where we can explore and learn more about God and his good plans for us each week, and focusses on the scripture for the upcoming Sunday. We would love for you to join us, even if it's just every once in a while.

Here are the scriptures for each Sunday and Bible Study leading up to Advent:

Aug 31 - A Living Sacrifice: **Romans 12:1-21**

Sep 7 – One Body, Many Members, Many Gifts: **1 Corinthians 12:1-31**

Sep 14 – Ministry of Reconciliation: **2 Corinthians 5:11-21**

Sep 21 – Fruit of the Spirit and the Flesh: **Galatians 5:16-26**

Sep 28 – Every Spiritual Blessing: **Ephesians 1:1-23**

Oct 5 – The Mind of Christ: **Philippians 2:1-16**

Oct 12 – Life in Christ: **Colossians 3:1-17**

Oct 19 – The Day of the Lord: **1 Thessalonians 4:13-5:11**

Oct 26 – Sound Teaching: **2 Timothy 3:10-4:5**

Nov 2 – Full assurance: **Hebrews 10:19-39**

Nov 9 – Faith and Works: **James 2:14-26**

Nov 16 – A Living Hope: **1 Peter 1:1-9**

Nov 23 – Fellowship with God: **1 John 1:5-2:6**

Nov 30 – The Revelation: **Isaiah 11:1-10; Revelation 1:1-8; 21:1-8**

Scripture: Romans 12:1-21

Therefore, brothers and sisters, in view of the mercies of God, I urge you to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God; this is your true worship. ² Do not be conformed to this age, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may discern what is the good, pleasing, and perfect will of God.

³ For by the grace given to me, I tell everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he should think. Instead, think sensibly, as God has distributed a measure of faith to each one. ⁴ Now as we have many parts in one body, and all the parts do not have the same function, ⁵ in the same way we who are many are one body in Christ and individually members of one another. ⁶ According to the grace given to us, we have different gifts: If prophecy, use it according to the proportion of one's faith; ⁷ if service, use it in service; if teaching, in teaching; ⁸ if exhorting, in exhortation; giving, with generosity; leading, with diligence; showing mercy, with cheerfulness.

⁹ Let love be without hypocrisy. Detest evil; cling to what is good. ¹⁰ Love one another deeply as brothers and sisters. Take the lead in honoring one another. ¹¹ Do not lack diligence in zeal; be

fervent in the Spirit; serve the Lord. ¹² Rejoice in hope; be patient in affliction; be persistent in prayer. ¹³ Share with the saints in their needs; pursue hospitality. ¹⁴ Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. ¹⁵ Rejoice with those who rejoice; weep with those who weep. ¹⁶ Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud; instead, associate with the humble. Do not be wise in your own estimation. ¹⁷ Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Give careful thought to do what is honorable in everyone's eyes. ¹⁸ If possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. ¹⁹ Friends, do not avenge yourselves; instead, leave room for God's wrath, because it is written, Vengeance belongs to me; I will repay, says the Lord. ²⁰ But If your enemy is hungry, feed him. If he is thirsty, give him something to drink. For in so doing you will be heaping fiery coals on his head. ²¹ Do not be conquered by evil, but conquer evil with good.

Sermon: The mercies of God

Do you ever wonder if church is worth the effort? I don't just mean getting up on a Sunday morning and driving here, I mean the hard work of getting to know people, volunteering your time with minimal thanks, and perhaps most of all, the difficulties that come from being in community with other people. It's hard work, and some days you might wonder whether it's worth it.

Monday morning my phone buzzed and there was an email. Actually, there were a dozen. Home Depot was having a sale, there were some about planning for Alpha, and notifications from the bank. But only one made my heart pound a little faster, because it gave hope that something I had almost given up on might not be dead after all.

I had a dear friend for many years, but our lives headed in different directions, and I didn't know how to love and care for them as I should have. A hard situation turned into an ugly one until we didn't speak. That message didn't fix everything, but it felt nothing short of miraculous. Like God opening a door to mend what was broken. It felt like God's mercy at work.

That's what we're exploring today: how God's mercy makes a difference. We'll see the perhaps surprising way that Paul connects God's mercy to true worship and the vitality of the church.

But first, what has God been doing in your life? It might be big or small. You might not even be completely sure that it was God, but have a sneaking suspicion that it might be.

I want to start by taking time to recognise God at work in our lives because it's how Paul starts this part of his letter to the church in Rome. Notice that he says, "Therefore, brothers and

sisters, in view of the mercies of God..." Everything else flows from this starting point. God's mercy is the well that we drink from even as we may grow weary from the journey.

Mercy speaks to deep compassion. Not just feeling bad, but doing good to someone when they're in the wrong. Paul wants us to remember how God has done that for us. He wants us to feel how good and kind God is, not to guilt us into service, but to motivate us to volunteer our lives to that same mercy and love. That's what true worship is: responding to God's goodness and mercy with our time, energy, resources, and hearts.

We are merciful because God is merciful. Not because we have to be, or because we're afraid of what will happen if we fail. Not because we need to earn God's love. But because we want to thank him.

If we feel like God is guilting us or twisting our arms, we will try to get away with giving as little as we can. But if we're living out of gratitude and the goodness of God in our lives, then the very same thing that felt like a chore becomes our deepest desire. Not giving God the scraps of our lives because we feel like we should, but offering everything to him because we don't want to live without him ever again.

Paul reminds us of something that Jesus said and showed all the time: even if we're living as God's enemies, he responds by doing good to us. You don't teach someone to love by yelling at them to be more considerate, or create peace with weapons.

One of the sneaky ways that evil spreads in our world is by convincing us that it's okay to do bad things to people if they did something bad to us. Hit back. Steal back. Say nasty things back. We're convinced that our evil cancels out their evil, but what really happens is that evil multiplies. It never ends until someone decides to stop the vicious cycle.

When God tells us to do something, he is also telling us who he is. If God is telling us to be patient, or generous, or compassionate, or humble, or to respond to evil with good, it is because that is what God is like. It is what he does.

It might seem like Paul is going back and forth a bit through all of this. He talks about God's mercy, and then worship, and then lists off different ways to serve and create unity in the church. But they're deeply connected. God's mercy leads to our desire to worship, and that worship is truest when it reflects Jesus.

One of the most surprising things Jesus modeled was finding and creating family. Jesus didn't get married and have kids like most men his age. Instead, he went around making family. People who had been told that they were dirty, or hard to love, or were always left out. And he didn't just let them follow him around, he chose to make them his family.

Jesus chose to rely on other people for food, clothes, and protection, and he chooses to rely on us now to spread the good news that he came to share. He could have done it all himself, but he chooses to include us, and to teach us to do the same for others.

It's a process, but when we treat people how he did, extending compassion to people we don't like or who frustrate us, that conquers evil. Not just coming to church, but becoming the church, by turning the strangers around us into actual family.

As a child grows, their bodies do too. They learn to talk and eat, and draw, and tell jokes, and give hugs, and pray. And as they figure out how each part has been designed to help and be helped, they experience the joy of all the good things they were created for. That's Jesus' will for us as well. He wants his body to grow and experience the joy of doing what it was made to do.

The greatest worship we can give is to live like Jesus by partnering with God in who he has made us to be, and being humble enough to see how we need others. This isn't an analogy— it's our reality. Your joy is meant to be my joy. My pain is meant to be your pain. God's good plans are meant to be our good plans.

God loves our songs and prayers and learning. But he wants more for us than that. It brings him joy when we grow to be more like him and care for each other how he cares for us. That's the joy of the church.

Paul puts it like this:

"Let love be without hypocrisy. Detest evil; cling to what is good. Love one another deeply as brothers and sisters. Take the lead in honoring one another. Do not lack diligence in zeal; be fervent in the Spirit; serve the Lord. Rejoice in hope; be patient in affliction; be persistent in prayer. Share with the saints in their needs; pursue hospitality. Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. Rejoice with those who rejoice; weep with those who weep. Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud; instead, associate with the humble. Do not be wise in your own estimation. Do not repay anyone

evil for evil. Give careful thought to do what is honorable in everyone's eyes. If possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.”

Because true worship is not just living like Jesus— it is living in Jesus. And whether we like it or not, we're not alone here. Take a look around you. This is the body of Jesus. And as you look around, there is someone who you need to forgive, or who you need forgiveness from. Someone who you know is in need, but it never seems to be the right time. Someone to support you, in your struggles, but it's felt too hard to ask. Today is the day to take a step. To forgive, to reach out in hospitality, to ask for help.

That is what it means to be the church, and it is so, so worth it. In this room, there are hundreds of stories of how God has been at work. Hundreds of proofs that being a part of his body has made a difference. And when we do, we join in with what Jesus is already doing, become living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God.

It is not easy, but we don't do it because it's easy, we do it because God has been so merciful to us, and he is calling us to show mercy. This is the good, pleasing, and perfect will of God and it is for you and me.