

Home Service for August 23, 2026

Welcome and Announcements

You may also find listening to some of your favorite hymns helpful in worship.

It takes a village to build the realm of God. It takes each of us to play our role and work together to build the kingdom.

Call to Worship:

Amid the forces of death and destruction, it takes a village to save us.

Amid the rivers that would carry us out to sea, it takes willing souls to pull us from the water. Amid the fear and hatred in our world, it takes ordinary people to reveal God's mercy. Come, let us worship.

Opening Prayer:

Gracious God, we present our very lives as holy and living sacrifices to your purposes. During this time of worship, we seek the renewal of our minds and the strengthening of our spirits. Show us your will, that we may know what is good, acceptable, and perfect in your sight. Amen.

Prayer of Confession:

Merciful God, wash away the injuries we have inflicted upon one another. We long to replace our bitterness in word and deed with acts of grace and mercy. We yearn to replace our willful neglect of others with acts of support and grace. We desire to walk in your path of joy and compassion, that we may bathe in the waters of your healing love. Amen.

Words of Assurance:

Thanks be to God who rescues us from our foes.

Thanks be to Christ who saves us from forces that would be our undoing.

In God's loving Spirit, we are set free and made whole again.

Read Psalm 124

If the Lord had not been on our side—
let Israel say—

² if the Lord had not been on our side
when people attacked us,

³ they would have swallowed us alive

when their anger flared against us;
⁴ the flood would have engulfed us,
the torrent would have swept over us,
⁵ the raging waters
would have swept us away.
⁶ Praise be to the Lord,
who has not let us be torn by their teeth.
⁷ We have escaped like a bird
from the fowler's snare;
the snare has been broken,
and we have escaped.
⁸ Our help is in the name of the Lord,
the Maker of heaven and earth.

Prayers of the People:

Lord, we hear the wonderful words from Matthew's gospel in which Simon Peter acknowledges Jesus as the Christ, the son of the living God. He is given the name Peter, the rock upon whom the church will be built. We would like to be the kind of "rock" that Jesus could count on; to be strong in the face of adversity; brave when danger is present; compassionate when sorrow and strife prevail. You have called us to be your church and we ask for your transforming love that we might be better witnesses for you. Today we name in our hearts and with our voices before you people that we love and those we do not, who are dealing with sorrow and illnesses; people who feel abandoned and alone; people who are entering schools and colleges, military service, the workforce. We also name those people and situations filled with joy and hope celebrations of special occasions, and often just a beautiful day. Hear the cries of our hearts to you, O God. Heal and transform lives. For we ask these things in Jesus' Name. AMEN.

Lord's Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name. Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day, our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For Thine is the kingdom, and the power and the glory forever and ever. AMEN

Read the Old Testament Lesson: Exodus 1:8–2:10

Then a new king, to whom Joseph meant nothing, came to power in Egypt. ⁹ “Look,” he said to his people, “the Israelites have become far too numerous for us. ¹⁰ Come, we must deal shrewdly with them or they will become even more numerous and, if war breaks out, will join our enemies, fight against us and leave the country.”

¹¹ So they put slave masters over them to oppress them with forced labor, and they built Pithom and Rameses as store cities for Pharaoh. ¹² But the more they were oppressed, the more they multiplied and spread; so the Egyptians came to dread the Israelites ¹³ and worked them ruthlessly. ¹⁴ They made their lives bitter with harsh labor in brick and mortar and with all kinds of work in the fields; in all their harsh labor the Egyptians worked them ruthlessly.

¹⁵ The king of Egypt said to the Hebrew midwives, whose names were Shiprah and Puah, ¹⁶ “When you are helping the Hebrew women during childbirth on the delivery stool, if you see that the baby is a boy, kill him; but if it is a girl, let her live.” ¹⁷ The midwives, however, feared God and did not do what the king of Egypt had told them to do; they let the boys live. ¹⁸ Then the king of Egypt summoned the midwives and asked them, “Why have you done this? Why have you let the boys live?”

¹⁹ The midwives answered Pharaoh, “Hebrew women are not like Egyptian women; they are vigorous and give birth before the midwives arrive.”

²⁰ So God was kind to the midwives and the people increased and became even more numerous. ²¹ And because the midwives feared God, he gave them families of their own.

²² Then Pharaoh gave this order to all his people: “Every Hebrew boy that is born you must throw into the Nile, but let every girl live.”

2 Now a man of the tribe of Levi married a Levite woman, ² and she became pregnant and gave birth to a son. When she saw that he was a fine child, she hid him for three months. ³ But when she could hide him no longer, she got a papyrus basket^[a] for him and coated it with tar and pitch. Then she placed the child in it and put it among the reeds along the bank of the Nile. ⁴ His sister stood at a distance to see what would happen to him.

⁵ Then Pharaoh’s daughter went down to the Nile to bathe, and her attendants were walking along the riverbank. She saw the basket among the reeds and sent her female slave to get it. ⁶ She opened it and saw the baby. He was crying, and she felt sorry for him. “This is one of the Hebrew babies,” she said.

⁷ Then his sister asked Pharaoh’s daughter, “Shall I go and get one of the Hebrew women to nurse the baby for you?”

⁸ “Yes, go,” she answered. So the girl went and got the baby’s mother. ⁹ Pharaoh’s daughter said to her, “Take this baby and nurse him for me, and I will pay you.” So the woman took the baby and nursed him. ¹⁰ When the child grew older, she took him to Pharaoh’s daughter and he became her son. She named him Moses, ^[b] saying, “I drew him out of the water.”

Read the Epistle Lesson: Romans 12:1-8

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. 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] 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] do it diligently; if it is to show mercy, do it cheerfully.

Read the Gospel Lesson: Matthew 16:13-20

When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, “Who do people say the Son of Man is?”

¹⁴ They replied, “Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets.”

¹⁵ “But what about you?” he asked. “Who do you say I am?”

¹⁶ Simon Peter answered, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.”

¹⁷ Jesus replied, “Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by flesh and blood, but by my Father in heaven. ¹⁸ And I tell you that you are Peter, ^[a] and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades ^[b] will not overcome it. ¹⁹ I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be ^[c] bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be ^[d] loosed in heaven.” ²⁰ Then he ordered his disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Messiah.

Message

Today's Epistle Lesson comes from Paul's letter to the Romans and as I both read the passage and listened to it, I felt that I heard Paul inviting me and all who read his letter to respond to God's steadfast love and overwhelming grace by offering ourselves as living sacrifices, in other words worshiping God by all what we say and do.

Paul was a man who stood in awe of God. He was amazed at God's steadfast love, overwhelming grace, and unconditional forgiveness. His introductory to the Romans, reads as a testament of what he believes and he took eleven chapters to describe and celebrate the love and grace of God. Paul's reasons for celebrating are extensive: The just shall live by faith, at the right time, while we were still sinners Christ died for us, those who have been baptized have been baptized into Christ death and life; God delivers us even when we are wretched people who do not understand ourselves or our actions, and God will never forsake his people.

Now, Paul is telling his readers to respond to God's love and grace in a specific manner. Paul's words are challenging each of us, but at the same time calls us to transform our lives. Think for a moment, Paul was writing to people who were well acquainted with the sacrificial system. Whether as Jews or participants in the mystery religions or good Roman citizens, animal sacrifices were common everyday occurrences. Sacrifices were demonstrations of a person's devotion to a particular God or religious belief. They were seen as acts of love. Paul is the first one to call for living sacrifices. He does not intend his readers to sacrifice living animals. Paul calls for a sacrifice of one's own life, the way we live our lives. This is an ongoing sacrifice. It is based, in part, upon the Jewish understanding of worship.

Christians have changed and corrupted the understanding of worship. Sadly, we have relegated it to an hour or more on Sunday. Christian worship involves singing hymns and songs, reading Scripture, listening to a sermon, giving an offering, and celebrating communion. This was not the original understanding of worship. For the Jews, worship was what they did in their daily lives. Their work was an expression of worship, as was their family roles, any leisure activities, their service to others and their actions in the community. People worshipped six days a week and rested on the seventh, celebrating the fact that the world did not depend solely on them and that God was capable of caring for them even if they rested for a day.

Take note that Paul does not encourage his readers to attend worship services more often, increase one's financial support of the congregation, serve on a committee,

or pray and study the Bible for a longer period of time every day. Paul is calling his readers to respond to God's love and grace by their daily words and actions. Work is transformed from a way to make money to a way to serve God along with our friends, family and neighbors. Relationships are opportunities to celebrate God's love and grace together and to encourage each other in our faith. Serving is a way to share the blessings God has poured into our lives. When we allow our lives to be lifted out of the mundane, they become holy and living sacrifices.

Paul's words go far beyond the common understanding of what it means to be a Christian. Paul is writing about something more than a religion of convenience, comfort, and a life without cost. Followers of Jesus Christ are to be living sacrifices. Our offering is ourselves, our time, talents and treasures. Nothing is to be held back. Certainly God has not held anything back in his relationship with us, He gave His only begotten Son for our sins. Paul realized that it is all too easy for Christians to be conformed to the thoughts and ideas of the world around them. He calls his readers to be transformed by the work of the Holy Spirit rather than molded into the image of the world. With the messages and images of the world all around us every moment of the day and night, this is difficult to do. It does not come automatically. We need to choose to do it.

Though we want to be individuals, there are powerful forces at work within us to cause us to conform. Our human nature causes us to want to be a part of the group. We want to stand out in the crowd, but we find ourselves dressing like all of our peers. We are conformed to the world when we find ourselves attempting to keep up with the Jones. We are conformed when we begin to believe that one more piece of technology, new car, piece of clothing, or look or shape will make us happy and whole.

We are conformed to the world when we listen to the news reports about the stock market and find ourselves fearful. Or find ourselves angry from reading the newspaper, or listening to the television or radio. Perhaps it is even worse if we look around the world and simply do not care. Fear, anger, and callous complacency are not products of God's kingdom. We are conformed to the world when we rationalize the common wisdom that we do not need to forgive others and that there is a limit to our love. Or, when we convince ourselves that we are in, while others are out. The Holy Spirit moves within our lives to transform us into people who have the image of their creator in their lives. It is the Holy Spirit who transforms us by the renewal of our minds so that our values become those of our Lord and Savior. We are transformed so that we are able to love the unlovable, and forgive the unforgiveable. We are transformed when forgiven and free we live to love and serve God, by loving and serving others.

Paul calls upon his readers to use their own, unique, specific talents and abilities to serve God and humankind. We do not need to be like anyone else. We do not need to sing like our favorite singer. We do not need to follow the steps of Mother Theresa, Martin Luther King, or anyone else we can think of. For we are not called to be like everyone else. We are called to discover our personal gifts and talents and to use those gifts and talents to the best of our ability in whatever situations we find ourselves. May we never forget that we are part of the body of Christ. We are not called to do everything. We are called to do that for which we are gifted. Remembering that each of us have been given gifts or talents by God to serve Him. It is freeing to receive the good news and to walk in its reality that we do not need to be anyone else but who we are. We just need to be ourselves, a child of God.

Paul was not the only one to experience God's grace. In the Old Testament, the prophet Isaiah recalls experiencing God's glory while he was worshipping in the temple. Isaiah saw the Lord along with his angels. He was overcome with awe. After his experience, Isaiah tells that the Lord had a task that to accomplish and wondered who he might send. Isaiah responded, "Here I am, Lord. Send me." May this be our response to God's call, having been recipients of God's abundant love and grace. Amen

Benediction:

Beloved, God calls us to use our power wisely and in the service of those the world has disempowered. May God bless you with the courage to notice injustices in the world and the perseverance to keep showing up with God and one another as we empower one another to set the world aright. Amen.