

Signs of Significance  
Sacrifice  
Matthew 4:1-11  
Ypsilanti First United Methodist Church

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Sacrifice. Whenever I hear that word, an old cartoon comes to mind. It is of a pig and a chicken looking at a breakfast plate of bacon and eggs. Then the pig says to the chicken. "For you, it's a contribution. For me, it's the supreme sacrifice."

Sacrifice—it's the practice of giving up something we treasure for a higher cause—a bigger purpose.

Sacrifice, originally comes from the Latin root word sacrificium which means to make something holy—

Today marks the first Sunday in the season of Lent—the 40 days, not including Sundays, before Easter. Lent is a time of reflecting and examining our spiritual lives and in particular finding greater meaning and purpose in them. This year we have chosen as a theme for the entire season—Signs of Significance—and each week we will examine a different sign as we seek to live lives of Significance—that is as we seek to live lives of greater purpose and meaning..

Our sign of significance this week is the word sacrifice. Traditionally this word conjures up the image of Jesus on a cross, paying the ultimate price for our sins. This is why today we have this

cross up here on the altar—As a traditional Christian symbol of sacrifice—the cross is a reminder of Jesus' willingness to risk everything for the love of all of God's children.

But we are not Jesus. And while we follow his examples and teachings and even take up our own crosses, in most cases, our path of discipleship is not this way of ultimate sacrifice.

Thankfully we are not called upon to be nailed to a cross. Yet, thinking back to the pig and chicken cartoon, Christian discipleship means more than just laying an egg from time to time or when it is convenient to do so.

While we are not the pig, nor are we Jesus, as disciples of one who risked everything for love, we too are called to sacrifice. We too are called to give things up, to weigh the costs, to make choices between what is significant and what is not in this life.

Jesus talked quite a bit about significance. He spoke often about what's significant in this life and what isn't—In the desert, when he was tempted by the devil—Jesus was answering the ultimate question—what is really most important in this life?

Jesus rejects economic solutions to gain power when he refuses to turn stones into loaves of bread. Jesus rejects a miracle promising presence to gain power when he refuses to jump down from the high tower and Jesus rejects a political-military solution to gain power when

he refuses to fall down and worship the devil thus gaining earthly power.

Jesus rejects all these ways of the world to gain power and influence—economic, miracle producing and political-military options. Jesus gives these ways of the world up—sacrifices them if you will—and he chooses a different way—the kingdom way—the way of love for others, the way of service. Love and service, Jesus says, are what is really most important in this life. Love and service are what really matter in life. Love and service are the stuff of a life of significance--

And this is why, on the altar today, we also have a heart—to remind that sacrifice at it's core is really about the way of love--

And love is the key here—it is the motivation and the cause for our sacrificial actions.

When we give things up—we do so not out of duty, not out of guilt, not out of fear—but rather out of love for someone else and love for Jesus himself. This is His way—the way of the heart, the way of holiness. This is the kind sacrifice that we are called to in this season and in our lives.

Thus we must examine ourselves and our lives. We must ask ourselves what really is most important and if we want to live a life of significance then we must be willing to sacrifice out of love--

Love for someone else, love for Jesus-- and this love is focused on what our choices and sacrifices can do for someone else.

Back in 2004, the Detroit Free Press published the following article called Women meet at a Christian Retreat: agree on Kidney Donation.

“Forty-nine year-old Lorraine Lamb had been on dialysis for six years. Although all three of her children had been tested for compatibility for donating, none of them had been able to help their mother. Lamb had resigned herself to a life on dialysis, which cleaned her blood but left her exhausted and demoralized. Glenda McCloskey came to the retreat to meet her sister, but her trip changed when she happened to meet Lamb and hear her story. McCloskey said, "I was just amazed at how different her life would be if she had a kidney, so I thought, 'I'll give her one.' It seemed a small thing to make a big difference in someone's life." Tests confirmed that McCloskey was a match, so she went through with the procedure to give a kidney to Lamb. Afterwards Lamb said, "It was kind and wonderful. What else would a Christian do, but I didn't think she understood the depths of what she was offering." Afterwards, McCloskey added, "This has all been very rewarding. There's no better feeling than knowing you can help someone else. That's what life's about." -- i

Sacrifice is about love for others-and about what love can do.

Last year, many folks read the story of Dr. Paul Farmer in the book *Mountains Beyond Mountains*.<sup>ii</sup> Dr. Paul Farmer works about two months a year in Boston, MA where he heads the Infectious Disease program at Harvard Medical School and treats patients at Brigham & Women's Hospital, but the rest of the year he spends most of his time in Haiti, the poorest country in our hemisphere.

You see Dr. Farmer's calling is to cure infectious diseases and to bring the lifesaving tools of modern medicine to those who need it most. He does this not out of duty, or fear or guilt, but out of love for others. And this love has compelled him to give up his life of comfort and instead offer himself to make a difference.

Dr. Farmer's sacrifice has made an enormous impact in solving the global health problems. And his personal sacrifice motivated by love for others has also touched on the issues of politics, wealth, social systems and disease. So that this one man's outreach has resulted in systemic changes for the good of humankind as a whole.

Living a life of significance—living a life of deep meaning and purpose means sacrifice—but not out of guilt or fear, but rather motivated out of love for others. And this is the kind of sacrifice which leads people to offer their resources to God—like the woman who shared her kidney or Dr. Farmer who shares his medical skills—and as

these kind of sacrifices are made—holy things happen—for the power of love takes over—and transformation begins to happen to individuals and to systems and even to nations and the world.

It all begins with love—love for another. This is the kind of love which Jesus said is most important. Sacrificial love—which changes us and the world.

Back in the beginning of December many of you decided to join in our second kingdom assignment—Back then, before Christmas I asked you to volunteer to look at your stuff and find something worth \$100 that you would be willing to sell and bring for a special offering today. Remember that this offering is not for our church, but for the poor and needy. And remember that sacrifice is about our asking the question what can I do for someone else? How can I care for others?

This is a question based on love—and this offering is really a love offering. We are going to sing a hymn now, and during the hymn I invite those of you with your special kingdom assignment offering to come forward and place it in the baskets provided.

And during this Lenten season as we seek to live lives of significance, may we remember that it begins with our sacrificial love of others—And may we, after the example of Christ as we reach out to make a difference with the power of love. Amen.

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<sup>i</sup> <http://www.detnews.com> (*The Detroit News*), *Women Meet at Christian retreat, Agree on kidney donation, September 22, 2004, Submitted by Jim Sandell*

<sup>ii</sup> Kidder, Tracey Mountains Beyond Mountains—the story of Dr. Paul Farmer