

“Fragrant Sacrifices and Offerings”—Ephesians 5:2

The text for this sermon in recognition of LWML Sunday, the theme of which is, “Fragrant Sacrifices and Offerings,” is Ephesians 5:2 → *Walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave Himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.* This is the text.

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.
Amen.

Take a look at our sanctuary, what many consider “the house of God.” What is it here that gives you the idea that this is “the house of God” or the place of His “presence?” Is it the chancel area with its altar and communion rail? Maybe it’s the ornate windows depicting the Triune God’s work in our lives. Maybe it is the place where you find “sanctuary” from all of the struggles and challenges of the world and can quietly “spend time with the LORD” in prayer. You could even consider it “the house of God” or the “place of His presence” because it is here amongst the gathered believers in Christ where His presence comes to us in His holy Supper!

The Old Testament Scriptures refer to “the house of the LORD” as the tabernacle which He instructed Moses to build after delivering them from their

slavery in Egypt. Later it referred the temple built under King Solomon in Jerusalem. In contrast to our “house of the Lord” which is so clean and ornate, these two places in the Old Testament were a much different atmosphere. They were filled with the stench of burning flesh, oil, incense and grain, all of which are described *as a pleasing aroma before the LORD* (cf. Exodus 29:18) And with all the slaughtering of animals and spilling of blood it was anything but a surreal, contemplative, prayerful atmosphere which we expect in churches today.

Even today fragrant offerings and sacrifices are present in “the house of the Lord!” By faith in the sacrifice of our Lord Jesus Christ, *Who loved us and gave Himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God*, we are enabled to be fragrant sacrifices and offerings before Him in both His Kingdom and in the earth.

Our text is taken from a letter which Paul wrote to the church in Ephesus while Paul was in prison for preaching the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Here is a man who considered himself to be “a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God” as a Christian-killer before His conversion to Christ! He believed that he was on a “mission from God” to destroy the Church. According to Philippians 3:5-6 Paul listed his “credentials” which people would consider worthy of God’s favor: *Circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of*

Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless. All this he counted as rubbish compared to the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus his Lord! (cf. Philippians 2:7) No, your sincerity, your commitment or your hard work are not counted as fragrant offerings and sacrifices before God. To be “a pleasing aroma” to God involves something far deeper.

Paul had come to realize what all the faithful in Christ have come to understand under the power of the Holy Spirit—that none of our labor is acceptable to God **on it’s own**. Our carnal, fleshly work cannot be acceptable in His sight because, as Isaiah 64:6 says, *all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment* in His sight! Although some people may be very pleased and impressed with our achievements, they still stink before the LORD.

In a sermon on our text proclaimed by Dr. Martin Luther, he stated: “This expression” (*a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God*) “Paul takes from the Old Testament. There the temporal sacrifices are described as being ‘a sweet-smelling savour’ unto God: that is, they were acceptable and well-pleasing to Him; but not, as the Jews imagined, because of the value of the work or of the sacrifices in themselves. For such thoughts they were chastised by the prophets often enough. They were acceptable on the ground of the true sacrifice which they foreshadowed and encircled. Paul’s thought is this: The

sacrifices of the Old Testament have passed. Now all sacrifices are powerless but that of Christ Himself; He is the sweet-smelling savour. This sacrifice is pleasing to God. He gladly accepts it and would have us be confident it is an acceptable offering in our stead.”

None of our works are fragrant sacrifices and offerings on the basis of how “valuable” we may consider them to be. They find their total value and acceptance before God in the Person & Work of Jesus and His sacrifice on the cross **for us!**

Once again we are faced with the reality of our fallen condition. We are at once sinners and saints. We have the terrible stain of sin upon us and at the same time have the wonderful promise of resurrection glory upon us through the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross. This wonderful fragrant and gracious sacrifice on our behalf is the one that God receives as *a fragrant offering and sacrifice* unto Himself.

In your baptism the Holy Spirit connected you to this *fragrant offering and sacrifice* of Jesus, through which you are forgiven and empowered to live a life of service to the LORD! Romans 12:1 says: *By the mercies of God . . . present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.* Thus, your life is *holy and acceptable to God* based upon His mercy displayed in the Person & Work of Jesus Christ! Presenting ourselves

as a living sacrifice means we recognize our identity in Christ's *fragrant offering and sacrifice* for us and strive to be faithful to Him in all the vocations of our life! In other words, it is Christ's *fragrant offering and sacrifice* which defines a good work in our lives before God, not our "work justification"—our efforts to explain it as good in some manner.

In obedience to the Great Commission of Jesus in Matthew 28 we go and make disciples by sharing the Gospel with people. In this way we *walk in* Christ's love based upon His fragrant sacrifice and offering **for them as well!** When you members of Christ's Church contribute to mission work through the mite box in the desire to do the Great Commission, it flows from the *fragrant offering and sacrifice* given once for all on the cross of Calvary! When we gather here for worship we submit to the proclamation of God's Law and Gospel, to worship Jesus as Lord in praise and thanksgiving, to distribute His forgiveness as His presence in this place, all because of the *fragrant offering and sacrifice* which Jesus offered for our justification and sanctification!

2 Corinthians 2:14-16 describes what happens when we leave this place to enter the world of our daily vocations: *Thanks be to God, Who in Christ always leads us in triumphal procession, and **through us spreads the fragrance of the knowledge of Him everywhere. For we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are***

perishing, to one a fragrance from death to death, to the other a fragrance from life to life. Who is sufficient for these things?

We leave this place to “stink for Jesus” by taking the news of His *fragrant offering and sacrifice* to those we encounter in our daily lives. To some, we will actually “stink” with the stench of death because they will reject our message and refuse to repent and believe in Christ. To some, we will actually “smell good” with the aroma of life because they will receive our message, repent and believe in Christ!

Paul places before us a good question: *Who is sufficient for these things?* None of us. In 2 Corinthians 3:5-6 he reminds us that we are not *sufficient in ourselves to claim anything as coming from us, but our sufficiency is from God, Who has made us sufficient to be ministers of a new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit. For the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.* We cannot produce the results of life and salvation in a person. Only the Holy Spirit can do that! We simply go forth to bring the *fragrant offering and sacrifice* of Christ, the one time sacrifice for all people, for all time, for all sin! Amen.

Now may the peace of God that passes all understanding
rule and reign in our hearts *as a fragrant offering and sacrifice* to Him
in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

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