

“Just Do It - With Grace!”

August 3, 2014

5th Sunday at Lake Harbor UMC – Spiritual Gifts Series

You might see a pattern in these Scriptures about spiritual gifts. We're in our third New Testament letter where spiritual gifts are mentioned. Again, Paul is addressing the church in Rome where Jews and Gentiles had come together. Different people from different backgrounds. How they would live together and how they would live in the world?

It's difficult for us to feel the weight of the life-and-death challenge of the Gospel like these Roman Christians did. We don't feel the pressure of persecution so closely. Maybe that's all the more reason for us to pay attention here. There's a message for us - from different backgrounds and situations, but bound together in Jesus Christ and each of us with different gifts. How do we live together and use our spiritual gifts effectively? And what does that have to do with anything outside of these walls?

Paul lays the foundation about what it means to have faith in Jesus Christ - who he is and what his life, death, and resurrection mean for us. Then he gets into the practical stuff. This is how we should live because of God's mercy on us. And it's written to the whole community. This is about their witness to the world.

How many of us like to hear that word “sacrifice?” Usually it's a negative. It's something we might not want to do. But Paul's invitation here is to offer ourselves as a living sacrifice. For those who received this letter, a living sacrifice didn't make sense. They brought animals for sacrifice. For you and me, sacrifice is tied to hardship, but Paul's invitation to seek God's will - and devote our whole lives to seeking God's will.

Paul calls that seeking our spiritual worship. The word “worship” comes from the word “worthship.” When we worship, we offer reverent devotion and allegiance. We acknowledge the worthiness of the One receiving honor. We say, “God, you're worthy to be honored. I'm devoted to you. I know who you are and what you've done for me. I come wanting to show you how much I love you, too.”

Hear Romans 12:1 from [The Message](#): “So here's what I want you to do, God helping you. Take your everyday, ordinary life—your sleeping, eating, going-to-work and walking-around life—and place it before God as an offering.” This is what we do! We take what God has given to us—all that we are—and give it back to God to use for a good, acceptable, and perfect purpose. Worshiping God happens in all of life, not just in a sanctuary on Sunday morning.

Sacrifice, here, means that we dedicate our lives to seeking God's will and doing God's work. We use the gifts that God has given us - and the Good News is that everyone receives spiritual gifts! Each one of us offers our gifts to the glory of God and

for the benefit of all. We need to hear the call to community here. In all world where a lot of our communication isn't so intimate, Roman Christians were dependent on one another for strength and support as they lived their faith, and so are we.

So that's why we hear the word about humility here. We can't consider ourselves more important than someone else, and the opposite is true, too. We can't downplay the gifts we have. Each gift is vital, and Paul is clear to mention some of the spiritual gifts.: prophesy, serving, teaching, encouragement, giving, leadership, mercy.

We know if we're using our spiritual gifts because we'll be transformed - there's a change inside of us - to the core of who we are.

- The transformed are focused on the ministry the Spirit gave them.
- The conformed seek a promotion; the transformed seek a ministry.
 - The conformed seek more stuff; the transformed seek the right stuff.
 - The conformed seek the comfort of the flesh; the transformed seek the renewal of the mind.
 - The conformed invest in the temporal; the transformed invest in the eternal.

To conform is to forget that we are given specific gifts. But we're called to be transformed - to know that God seeks each of us and uses each of us. You have to be you - not anyone else - but you have to use your gifts!

How do we know if we're using spiritual gifts well? We find deep-down joy. We hear others' affirm the gifts in us. We know that the Body of Christ is built up. For those of you who have completed a spiritual gifts inventory, I'd bet you weren't totally shocked at what you discovered. You've been using those gifts already, and yet, what a wonderful thing to be able to celebrate that and give God glory! God brings out the best in us!

When we discover and identify our own gifts, we're better able to call out gifts in others, and that builds up the Body of Christ. We use our gifts for the greater good and realize that it's not about what I want, but what God wants. We serve out of love and obedience because of God's love and mercy in our lives. When we love God and love each other, that's transformation!

We have all the gifts we need for spiritual health and growth. God gives us the power through the Holy Spirit, and we see growth when people use their spiritual gifts. Maybe it's growth in numbers, or it might be growth in relationships and depth. That growth happens because we claim who we are: one Body in Christ Jesus. He is our foundation.

We come to the table together - dependent on God's grace and remembering God's mercy that is new every morning. We should come with expectation for what God will do in us and through us. Many children's lives were touched this week because of your prayers and because of your time and presence here. 59 kids were here! Some

of them may never have heard about Jesus before. That might be hard to believe, but can you imagine what it was like to hear about Jesus' love for the first time because VBS happened?

We don't know the seeds that were planted in them, but we are transformed because of what we invested. It was amazing to hear kids re-tell the Bible stories that they learned - about the ten lepers who were healed, the Samaritan woman at the well, the thief on the cross, and Saul and Ananias. I saw kids singing praises to God! And I saw spiritual gifts at work - kids who wanted to help and serve, kids who had a heart for mission.

Just do it - and do it with grace. Thanks be to God. AMEN.