



from the desk of . . .
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Pentecost

JUST JUMP IN

Romans 12:3-6

In the land of Norway there's a valley. This valley is long & narrow with mountainous peaks that tower 1000's of feet high; & nestled deep inside that valley is a village.

(X) Rjukan has existed for over 113 years.

It's a beautiful little village that's known for its' scenic cable car & nearby winter sports. (X)

(Rjukan was originally founded as a company town for Norsk Hydro, which set up an aluminum plant there to utilize the hydro power from the nearby 342 foot Rjukanfossen waterfall). (X)

It's a great little village ... but they have one small problem. Because the walls of the mountains rise so high above them, from September through March the sun is blotted out & the city exists in a shadow for over $\frac{1}{2}$ the year. Despite its' beauty, this lovely village has been a very dark & dismal place to live.

And that's way it was ... until about 12 years ago when they found a way to "pipe" sunlight down into the valley.

(X) The citizens raised \$850,000 & built 3 huge state-of-the-art mirrors to reflect the sun's rays down into the village square to illuminate it. These computer-powered mirrors shift every 10 seconds to track the movements of the sun during the day & reflect the light to the village.

It took a lot of energy & a lot of effort to pipe sunlight down into that very dark & dismal land.

And about 2,000 years ago, God spent a lot of energy & a lot of effort to bring the "Light of life" (John 8:12) down into a dark & dismal world.

And it all happened on the Day of Pentecost.

Today is Pentecost. It's the day that The Holy Spirit came upon those who believed in Jesus. Today is the day that we celebrate the birth of the Church.

We read about it in the 2nd chapter of The Acts.

We're told that there was a powerful noise that "sounded like a strong wind blowing," (The Acts 2:2) & then, (X) something that "looked like tongues of fire" (The Acts 2:3) "touched each person".

And at that point all the believers who were gathered there "began to talk in other languages." (The Acts 2:4)

There were visitors in Jerusalem at that moment "from every country in the world." (The Acts 2:5)

They'd come to celebrate the Jewish Harvest Festival.

(Deuteronomy 16:9-10)

My guess is that at any given moment down at Millennium Park in Chicago, (X) there are tourists from at least a dozen different countries.

Imagine all of us being down there ... & all of a sudden Leslie begins to speak in Japanese ... Lorna speaks in Spanish ... Sue's talking in French ... Harry in Russian ... Bill in German ... Dick in Chinese ... Judy in Italian ... each of them telling of the wondrous love & power of God!

That's what we're seeing in The Acts 2. It's an amazing moment. But The Holy Spirit wasn't just given for a single day event. This 3rd Person of the Trinity has taken up residence in all who have come to faith in Jesus, (2 Timothy 1:14) with the purpose of enabling us to serve our Lord with divine-given abilities. There are 4 passages in the N.T. that specifically deal with this. Here's one ...

Listen now to Good News from the Apostle Paul to the Church in Rome, & to the Church also here in Rolling Meadows.

Within your hearing comes the Word of the Lord ...

And because of God's gracious gift to me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you should. Instead, be modest in your thinking, and judge yourself according to the amount of faith that God has given you. We have many parts in the one body, and all these parts have different functions.

In the same way, though we are many, we are one body in union with Christ, and we are all joined to each other as different parts of one body. So we are to use our different gifts in accordance with the grace that God has given us. (Romans 12:3-6)

May the Lord grant that we may engage in contemplating the mysteries of His Heavenly wisdom with really increasing devotion, to His glory and to our edification. Amen

I was on the swim team when I was in college. I have my senior life saving certificate, & even worked for a short time as a lifeguard. But initially, let me tell you, I was scared to death of the water. My grandparents got me swimming lessons for my birthday gift when I turned 8. And by the end of the 10-12 lessons, all the other kids were swimming & even jumping off the diving boards ... but I was still down in the shallow end, just learning to hold my head underwater. However, by the end of the following summer, you couldn't get me out of the water ...
& I was diving off the high dive.

Today's message is entitled ... **"Just Jump In."** And let me tell you right up front, my goal this morning is to move any of you who are just hanging on in the "shallow end of the pool" into active, enthusiastic participation. I want you, who are just spectators, to become contributing members of the team.

And to do that we're going to focus on the Apostle Paul's letter to the Church in Rome. which gives us helpful instruction on how to jump in, & where to jump in, & when to jump in ... & that's going to be our outline.

Now Paul's writing about the Church,
& he's using the analogy of the human body.

He says that just as the human body has many parts, (eyes, liver, lungs, knees, fingers), & they all have to work together in order for the body to function successfully, so in a Church there are a wide variety of people, & each one plays a critical role ... **nobody** is unimportant, **everybody** has a contribution to make.

Now I want you to see how important this topic is to the Apostle Paul ... this whole notion of "jumping in" & participating on Jesus' team.

"Because of God's gracious gift to me I say to every one of you." Now anyone who ever heard Jesus teach knows that when He wanted to underscore His important points, He would 1st say, "I am telling you the truth"

(John 5:24) And Paul's sort of doing that here ...

"I say to every one of you."

"Listen up; this is really important, so pay attention."

Paul's saying, "if you haven't already jumped in ... this is for you" ... God doesn't want us watching the action ... He wants us in the pool.

But there's something we need to do before jumping in, & that's a little self-assessment. God wants us to do some **reflection** on the way He has made us.

There's a key word ($\varphi\rho\nu\nu\epsilon\iota\nu$) that appears in each of the 1st 2 sentences ... it's the word "think." Paul writes ...

"Do not think of yourself more highly than you should.

Instead, be modest in your thinking."

Paul wants us to do some self-reflection.

He wants us to ponder about the way God made us so that we can know ... how, where, & when ... to jump in.

So, are you ready to do some self-assessment? ...

#1 ... decide **how** to make our big splash.

This is where we begin. Imagine that you're sitting at the Rolling Meadows' pool, (X) & watching people go up the high diving board. ... The 1st thing you notice is that everybody has a different way of entering the water. Are you picturing this? ... And the way they enter the water seems to be a reflection of who they are.

Some do a cannonball; (X) splashing everyone around them. Are you picturing this guy? ... He wants to get as many sunbathers wet as he possibly can.

Then there's the clown who wants people to laugh, (X) so he does the belly smacker. There's the beautiful young girl (X) who does the swan dive. Then Mr. Olympian (X) does the double-flip with the $\frac{1}{2}$ twist.

Then there's the shy person (X) who goes out to the end of the board & just jumps.

Each one has a unique way of entering the water ...
& it's reflected in their personality.

Now what Paul wants us to understand is that how we jump in/participate on God's team depends upon the unique way that He has made each of us. And he underscores this by saying, "We have many parts in the one body, & all these parts have different functions."

He says that, "we are to use our different gifts."

So, let me ask you ... do you know what your unique spiritual gift is? ... Some of you may be wondering ...

"I don't even know what a spiritual gift is?"

So, let me give you a definition. A spiritual gift is a special **ability** that God gives to people for the sake of **advancing** Christ's Kingdom. The reason it's called a spiritual gift is because it's **empowered** by the 3rd Person of the Trinity ... The Holy Spirit.

Which raises the obvious question ... how do we get the Spirit in our life? How & when does this take place?

Who knows the answer? ...

We get The Holy Spirit in our life when we put our hope & trust in Jesus, & become His follower.

Scripture teaches that The Holy Spirit is a "gift" reserved for those who have come to faith in Jesus.

(The Acts 2:38)

It's for people who have prayed ...

"Jesus, please forgive me of my sins. Thank you for dying on the cross, & taking the punishment that should have been mine. I want you to be the Lord of my life."

When we pray that, earnestly ...

The Holy Spirit comes to live inside of us, & one of the things that happens as a result of that is that He gives us a spiritual gift. (1 Corinthians 12:7)

Now there are 4 lists of spiritual gifts in Scripture.

There's this one in Romans 12.

There's also a list of spiritual gifts in:

1 Corinthians 12, & Ephesians 4, & 1 Peter 4.

Interestingly, if we compare those lists we'll quickly discover that they're not all the same. Some of the lists are longer. Some gifts are mentioned on several lists, some are mentioned only once. In other words, God isn't giving us an exhaustive list of every gift that's out there ... we have here just a sampling.

In fact, you may have 2-3-4 of the spiritual gifts described in these passages. So, let's take a closer look at the 7 gifts that are presented in Romans 12. And as we look at this passage together ... here's what I want you to do ... I want you to think, think, think, think, think.

I want you to think about how God may have wired you.

Which of these gifts tugs at you?

"If our gift is to speak God's message, we should do it according to the faith that we have; if it is to serve, we should serve; if it is to teach, we should teach; if it is to encourage others, we should do so.

Whoever shares with others should do it generously; whoever has authority should work hard; whoever shows kindness to others should do it cheerfully." (Romans 12:6-8)

The 1st one mentioned is "speaking God's message." This is the person who has an appropriate word that seems to come from God. It may be a word of challenge, a word of direction, a word of correction, a word of inspiration ... but this person seems to have a knack for saying the very thing that needs to be said. And people say ... "Wow, that came straight from God." ... And it did!

The 2nd gift on this list is ... "the gift of serving." This is the person who loves to work behind the scenes in a supportive role. These are people who are often good with their hands, or tools, or in artistic ways, or on computers. These are the people who set up tables & chairs, & wash dishes. These are the people we would say do the "housekeeping" kind of chores that need to be done in order for ministry to take place.

These people don't have a desire to be up front, they're content to be behind the scenes. If we'd ask them to stand up here & lead a worship service, they'd flatly refuse ... they're uncomfortable in the limelight.

There are a lot of people in serving roles here at C.C.R.M. They trim the shrubbery, & take care of the flowers, they set up the sanctuary ... they serve so that everything here is attractive. If you think this place looks nice it's because people are using their serving gift.

3rd is "the gift of teaching."

These are people who like to study & understand Scripture, & then are able to explain it to others, & help them apply what they've learned to their lives.

The 4th gift is ... "encouragement."

This gift includes stuff like counseling, helping people unravel difficult circumstances in their lives;

coaching, comforting, challenging, inspiring ...
are all offshoots of the encouraging gift.

The 5th gift is ... "sharing." Some translations use the word "giving" here. Now please don't misunderstand. Don't assume that if you don't have this gift that you don't have to give or share. Some of these spiritual **gifts** are also spiritual **responsibilities**.

There are some things that God requires of every follower of Jesus ... it's just that He enables some believers to excel in certain areas.

For example, the last gift ... encouraging. If that's not your gift it doesn't mean that you don't have to encourage others.

It isn't an excuse for you to be critical or cynical or difficult to get along with. We all have a responsibility to encourage ... Scripture commands that. (1 Thessalonians 5:11)

But some people do it really well.

The same thing is true with this gift of sharing/giving. Scripture teaches that every follower of Jesus is to start with the 1st 10%, a tithe of their income, (Leviticus 27:30-33), & give it back to the Lord in recognition that everything has come from His hands.

And when we fail to do that,

Scripture warns that we're stealing from God. (Malachi 3:8)

Every follower of Jesus ... 10%, right off the top.

But some people look at that & say, "That's just the starting point for me. I can do better than that." We're talking about people who give over & above their regular offerings. Once again, I've witnessed these countless times here ... with freewill offerings, or with things being purchased & not turning in a receipt to be reimbursed.

But givers give more than money ... they give gifts, they give time, they give talents. It's a generosity of spirit.

I pray for people like this to come to C.C.R.M. We have so many opportunities before us, & the reality is that most of them require financial resources.

So, if you have the gift of sharing/giving it's an over/above sort of thing.

The next spiritual gift is one of "authority" ... it's leadership. If you have this gift you're good at casting vision. You're good at motivating people.

You're good at giving direction in a clear way.

You're good at recruiting followers.

I love the statement that I once heard about leadership.

"If a man thinkth he leadth,
& hath no one following ... he is merely taking a walk."

You know if you have the gift of leading
if there are actually people following you.

Gift #7 ... "showing kindness."

This is the person who loves to help others. They want to see people cared for. They like to visit the sick, the shut-ins. They make meals. They drive people to appointments. They send cards. They are there to help.

Okay, 7 gifts on that list ... did you see yourself in any one of them? If you did, circle it there in your outline. ... Paul writes, "we are to use our different gifts."

And how you "jump in" the water here at C.C.R.M.,
depends on the way that God has gifted you.

Okay, let's talk about where to jump in. Let's say that you've discovered what your spiritual gift is encouragement... now you need to get tuned in to the Church. Listen to the prayer concerns on Sunday morning, & then not only pray for that individual,
but send them a card of support.

There are many opportunities here at C.C.R.M.
So, how do we decide **where** to use our spiritual gift(s)
once we've figured out what our spiritual gift(s) is?

It comes down to one word ... **passion**.

Say that with me ... (*passion*). What turns you on?
What arena of ministry do you get excited about?

Does your heart beat fast when you start talking
about children? ... Or about people who haven't come to
faith? ... Or about music? ... Or about worship? ... Or
about outreach activities? ... Or about fellowship events?
... Or about shut-ins? ... Or about building & grounds? ...

What arena of ministry really gets you excited?

As I studied Romans 12 this past week I noticed
that the Apostle Paul, right in the middle of his
description of spiritual gifts, begins to hit at the
importance of having a passion for the role that we play
on Jesus' team. In this list Paul starts using extra words
to describe the use of these gifts.

Now if we were back in grammar class in school we'd
call these adverbial modifiers. Now for any of you who
may have forgotten what they are ...

adverbial modifiers tell us how to get a job done.

Look again at the gift of sharing. ...

How is this gift supposed to be exercised? ...
What's the extra word that Paul adds there? "Whoever
shares with others should do it ... (**generously**)."

How are those with authority to accomplish their gift? ...

(work hard)

How about the gift of kindness? ... *(cheerfully)*

In other words, when we're using our spiritual gift, use it in a place where we can throw ourself into it.

Use our gift where we can use it passionately.

Now sometimes, admittedly, we don't know whether we're going to be passionate about an area of ministry until we try it out.

Sometimes finding out where our passion is can be a trial & error sort of deal. "I tried that area of ministry, & I really didn't get turned on."

Okay, try something else.

Okay, how do we know where to plug in? ...

We know where to plug in by the passion it generates. We talked about this yesterday at Susan Badame's Memorial Service. Susan was passionate about crocheting, & she was excited to discover she could use that "gift" in a ministry with our shut-ins.

Some people will be passionate about doing something on Jesus' team similar to what they've been doing all week long. Patty & Joe have been school teachers, & yet they want to teach S.S. here.

On the other hand, some people will say, "I want to do something totally different than I do all week long."

My Church in Key West had lots of glass doors, all along the side of the sanctuary, & on both sides of the Fellowship Hall. There was a Lt. Col. in the Army stationed down there at the base, who was a member of our congregation. Every Saturday he would come & wash all those windows. He told me, "I lead people all week, I make decisions every day, I want to do anything but lead." All he wanted to do was clean the panes of glass, so, people had a nice view.

Discover where God has given you a passion.

Finally, decide "when" to jump in.

Here's one last insight from Romans 12. One of the things that I noticed when I read this passage out loud was how choppy it sounded.

"If it is to serve, we should serve; if it is to teach, we should teach; if it is to encourage others, we should do so."

And actually, our English translations even smooth out the passage more than it was in the original Greek.

"If serving, serve; if teaching, teach; if encouraging, encourage."

What's Paul trying to communicate by his writing style?

What's Nike's slogan? ... (**Just do it!**) (X)

This is the Nike passage. Just do it. Roll up your sleeves & do it. Don't wait for an engraved invitation.

Don't get stymied by analyzing things too deeply.

"I think I may want to do this someday."
Paul's saying, "the time to do it is today."

And so, I would say to those of you who have not yet jumped on Jesus' team here at C.C.R.M.,
it's time to take the next step.

And if you're still uncertain where to plug yourself in, there's a handout in your program that may help you. This sheet of paper lists some things that we do around here. Look it over, & I want you to identify where your interests lie. What are you passionate about?

And if you don't see what you're looking for on the list, then down at the bottom where it says "other" ... write in what you believe God is calling you to do. We want you to get your toe in the water & get involved, but even more important ... God wants you to get involved. And ... this is for everyone.

"All of you are Christ's body, & each one is a part of it."

"There are different kinds of spiritual gifts, but the same Spirit gives them. There are different ways of serving, but the same Lord is served. There are different abilities to perform service but the same God gives ability to all for their particular service. The Spirit's presence is shown in some way in each person for the good of all." (1 Corinthians 12:4-7)

MARANA THA