

Osaka International Church

Date: April 21st, 2013, AGM Message

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Title: Serving in the Church

Scripture: Romans 12:1-8

Key Verse: Romans 12:1

I. Introduction

Good morning! In **1 Peter 4:10**, Peter tells us, **“Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms.”** This afternoon we will have our Annual General Meeting (AGM) and we will have the joy of hearing how our brothers and sisters have been serving at OIC in many roles. Thank you for your service to the Lord and to one another! God bless you!

Many people are giving generously of their time and abilities to serve the church, but there is still more to be done. So this morning I want to encourage all of us to move forward in ministry and volunteer service so that God may be glorified more and more in our church and in this land. The author of Hebrews put it this way in **Hebrews 10: 23-25**, **“Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another--and all the more as you see the Day approaching.”**

Before we talk more about serving in the church though, I want to briefly review the reasons for our service. Let's take a look at a few verses from Romans. In **Romans 1:17**, Paul declared the theme of his letter to the Romans, saying, **“For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: ‘The righteous will live by faith.’”**

Here, the focus is on righteousness from God received by faith. But this gift of righteousness is made possible only by God's mercy and grace given through Jesus' death on the cross. **Romans 3:22-24** explains, **“This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.”**

We are all sinners, unable to save ourselves from the death that sin brings, but God has provided salvation and eternal life for us through the work of Jesus Christ. When we place our faith in Jesus, then we have peace with the Creator God who made us. **Romans 5:1**, **“Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,”**

Paul makes sure we understand that this peace is received through faith in Jesus, not by works. **Romans 10:9**, **“That if you confess with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.”**

In the first eleven chapters of Romans, Paul proclaimed the great doctrines of the Christian faith. But I don't think Paul's objective was to make us experts in doctrine. Rather, I think that Paul is striving to motivate us to commitment and action. So, today, together with Paul, I want to challenge you to renew your commitment to Jesus and to loving service in His Name. Let's listen to what Paul wrote in Romans 12:1-8.

II. Scripture Romans 12:1-8 (NIV)

[1] Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God--this is your spiritual act of worship. [2] Do not conform any longer 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 measure of faith God has given you.

[4] 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 who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. [6] We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. If a man's gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith. [7] If it is serving, let him serve; if it is teaching, let him teach; [8] if it is encouraging, let him encourage; if it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously; if it is leadership, let him govern diligently; if it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully.

III. Teaching

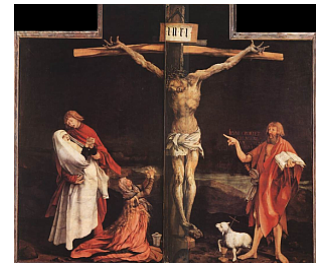
Romans 12:1 says, “**Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship.**” Notice the word, “therefore.” This word points back to the preceding chapters and tells us that Paul is now announcing a conclusion that flows from his teaching. What has he been teaching? Paul taught a lot of things, but here he says, “**in view of God's mercy,**” so I Paul is referring especially to his teachings about the mercy and grace of God that we receive through faith in Jesus.

From this transitional verse, we see that all along Paul's objective was to fill our hearts with thankfulness for God's love and to move us to action. Paul does not command us to become living sacrifices; Paul urges us. Our salvation is not dependent on our works. But still there are great benefits in serving God. And so, Paul says, “offer your bodies.” We should offer our whole selves to God, but Paul specifically mentions our bodies here, perhaps because active ministry requires our bodies.

As an appropriate response to God's great mercy and love, Paul urges us to worship God by offering our bodies as living sacrifices to God. I think the idea of a, “living sacrifice,” must have seemed quite strange to the Jews. They were used to offering sacrifices of animal sacrifices at the temple. But those sacrifices were dead sacrifices. The animal was killed and then burnt on the altar. Now Paul is talking about a new kind of sacrifice, a living sacrifice - a sacrifice of Christians offering their lives to God daily and hourly.



Jesus Himself was the example of a living sacrifice. His whole human life was a sacrifice. Jesus came and gave His life in service to others, even to the point of death on the cross in payment for our sins. But the cross was not the end. Instead, the cross was the entryway into the new resurrection life. And, Jesus taught His disciples saying in **Matthew 10:38-39**, “**and anyone who does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.**” This verse also reveals the idea of a living sacrifice that brings life. When we give our lives as an offering to God, we find new life.



Perhaps Saint Francis of Assisi was meditating on these things when he wrote his famous prayer.

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace.

Where there is hatred, let me sow love; where there is injury, pardon; where there is doubt, faith; where there is despair, hope; where there is darkness, light; and where there is sadness, joy.

O Divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek

to be consoled as to console; to be understood as to understand; to be loved as to love. For it is in giving that we receive; it is in pardoning that we are pardoned; and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.
Amen

If we live for God and for others, we die to self. And in that process, I think we will discover a new life, a life filled with joy and peace, a life wholly focused on pleasing God. By setting ourselves apart for service to God, and by continually giving ourselves to His work and His purposes, we become living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God. All along, Paul has had in mind the goal of bringing us to the point of making this decision. Paul wants us to be saved, of course. But Paul also wants much more, Paul wants to see us make a

total commitment to God.

There is an old joke. A chicken and a pig are walking down the road when they see a sign that says the church is having a prayer breakfast. The chicken says, "Let's help the church out. I will offer some eggs, and you can donate a ham." The pig says, "Wait a minute! For you that's a contribution, but for me that's a total commitment."



Many people contribute to the work of the ministry. But Paul experienced the blessings that come with making a total commitment, a commitment to serve God no matter what the cost. If you want to experience a relationship with God on a whole new level, the way to do that is to make a total commitment. But is not a commitment leading to death; it is a commitment that leads to new and abundant life.

In **John 10:10b (NKJV)**, Jesus tell us, "I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly." Do you want to have abundant life? Abundant life is not found by holding back; abundant life is found by going forward. There is a great need for people who are willing to offer themselves as living sacrifices to God and His work in this world. Jesus gave His life on the cross to pay the price for our sins and to offer us the gift of eternal life in heaven with Him. We need to humbly receive this gift from the Lord. But, having received, how will we respond to what Jesus has done for us?

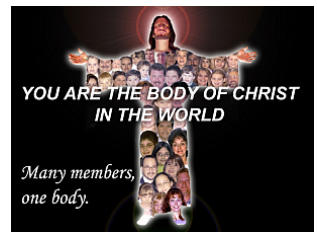


Paul urges us to respond by leaving our sins behind, changing our thinking, seeking after and obeying God's will, walking in humility and serving God. **Romans 12:2-3**, "Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is--his good, pleasing and perfect will. 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 measure of faith God has given you."

The world will try to press you into its mold. The people of the world will try to get you to do the same sinful things they do. They will say, "Everyone is doing it. A little bit doesn't matter. So what if it is a sin, you work hard, you deserve this pleasure." The world is full of temptations. As this photo illustrates, even if you have a good heart, there are a lot of temptations around us. But we are in Christ; we don't have to conform to the patterns and habits of this world. We can be transformed into something beautiful. When our minds and hearts are fixed on Christ, we will know His will and learn to walk in His ways.



Each of us is a unique individual, a special creation of God. And so, we are all different, and that is okay. In **Romans 12:5-6a**, Paul teaches us, "so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. We have different gifts, according to the grace given us." By the grace of God, we have different gifts and roles and that is a very good thing, because together we are complete, the Body of Christ.



The list that Paul gives after this is perhaps the most foundational list of spiritual gifts. Some people have called these the, "motivational gifts," because they have as much to do with why we do things as with what we do. They are heart gifts that get to the core of what motivates and inspires us.

Paul lists seven gifts in verses 6-8, and with each gift, Paul urges those who have the gift to use it appropriately. The gifts mentioned here are, **prophecy, serving, teaching, encouraging, giving, leadership, and mercy**. I believe that every Christian has one or more of these gifts. And if we make the commitment to serve the Lord using our gifts, then the church will grow and God will be glorified. We should not hide, deny, or neglect our gifts; instead, we should use our gifts, for the strengthening of the church and for the glory of God.



If you make the commitment to know and use the spiritual gifts that God has given you, you will be

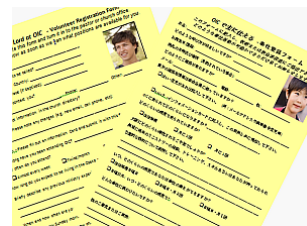
fruitful and fulfilled in your ministry and role in the church and in your life. If we all use the gifts the Lord has given us, then we will be productive for the Kingdom of God and for His glory. Amen? Amen!

IV. Conclusion

May I encourage you, even urge you, this morning to know your spiritual gifts and to make the commitment to use them for the glory of God? Make a total commitment, and go forward to new levels in your relationship with God.

We can and should serve the Lord all week long, at home, at the office, at school, or wherever we may go. Serving and sharing the love of Jesus at home and in the community is very important. But this morning, I would like for us to each think especially about how we might be able to serve in the church ministry. Many of you are already serving faithfully in various roles. But some people may be hesitating or may not know how to get started.

To make it easier to get started, we have placed a new Volunteer Registration Form in the bulletin. Sometimes people have the desire to serve, but never manage to get started. This form should make it easier to get connected and get started in serving. You can fill it out today and put it in the offering basket, or give it to me after the service. If you need some time to pray first, that is fine. Take some time and pray about how you might be able to serve.



I am sure that there are also some people who, for various reasons, feel like they are just not ready to serve at this time. I want to assure you that that is okay also. If you are not ready to serve now, then please wait until you are ready. The purpose of the Volunteer Registration Form is to make it easy for people who want to serve to get started. I don't want to put any pressure on anyone. But I do want to encourage everyone to pray about how they can serve and to volunteer when they are ready.

Let's close with a thought from one of Jesus' parables. Many of you know the parable of the talents. In the parable a wealthy man entrusted talents to each of his servants before going away on a long journey. **Matthew 25:15, "To one he gave five talents of money, to another two talents, and to another one talent, each according to his ability. Then he went on his journey."** When the man returned, he required each of his servants to give an account of how they had invested the talents they received.

Our time, finances, energy, education, spiritual gifts and natural abilities are all like these talents. The man is like our Lord Jesus, He came once to give His life as an offering for sin and He will come again to judge all things. When Jesus comes, He also will ask us to give an account of how we have used the things He gave us. Like the servants in the parable who invested wisely, we also will be rewarded if we have wisely invested the things we have received for the glory of God.

On the day when Jesus returns, I am sure we all want to hear from our Lord what the faithful servants in the parable heard from their master. **Matthew 25:21, "His master replied, 'Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!'"**

Let's pray.

V. Closing Prayer