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Old Mission / New Vision
The Open Sourced Way

Biblical Text: Romans 12:1-3

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One of my absolutely favorite things in my house when I was growing up... was my family's set of the *Encyclopedia Britannica*. Who else had one?

We had the whole thing – A-Z, plus the Indexes, plus annual supplements every year, all right there in our living room. Whenever I had a question, which was all the time, my parents said the same thing: *“Go look it up.”*

Truth be told, at first *I hated that answer*. But after a while, I was in heaven. I felt like everything I could ever want to know was contained there, since the *Britannica* billed itself as *“the sum of all human knowledge.”*

I would listen to my teachers, then go home and check out what they said! *Knowledge is power!* They didn't always appreciate my saying *“That's not what it says in the encyclopedia.”* – I'm just saying!

Today is different. How many of you have a smart phone, or at least a relatively intelligent one? Or how many have a computer that connects with the *Internet*? **Almost all of us do.** We have open access to incredible amounts of information. The world has changed.

Today, *Wikipedia*® has replaced the *Encyclopedia Britannica* or *World Book* of my childhood. And there's something more. *Anyone* can contribute to *Wikipedia*® - scholars, scientists, but also average Joes like you and me!

It's called *“open sourcing.”* The first use of the term *“open source”* appeared regarding computer software in about 1998. A group of developers made a case for *“open source software”* which provides the source code freely to users rather than *“proprietary”* software where the code is closely guarded.

Fifteen years later, *“open source”* is now applied to information sources for non-copyrighted items (*writing, graphics and music,*) that can be used and adapted without royalty or in violation of trademark® or copyright® laws. I love the idea of *“open sourcing.”*

For years I have wondered how to become an “*open source church*” - where our ministry is open to anyone - where people are free and trusted to follow God in ways that are consistent with what God has called the Church to be.

A couple of years ago, I came across a book, [Open Source Church: Making Room for the Wisdom of All](#), by Landon Whitsitt¹ that makes a case for such a Church that is intentionally diverse, that encourages independence of thought, values decentralization, and values the input of all who are willing.

In part, that’s what led me, and the leaders at Old Mission, to open our *vision process* that we’ve been following since January, to the congregation on two “**Vision 2020**” Sundays coming up the next two Sunday.

We truly believe that our vision will be stronger and more what God wants - if our vision is “*open-sourced!*” I hope you’ll be in worship to hear the excitement from our leaders and contribute your responses and ideas.

We also hope you’ll stay after worship for coffee and conversation in Hanson Hall with our leaders in person. There also will be online options.

Where did we get such a crazy idea? From the New Testament, right here in the Bible, back before Bishops and denominations, back before the division between clergy and laity, when every follower of Jesus was an active part.

In our text from Romans 12, Paul says this: “*I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.*”²

That was a radical idea, from a teacher of the Law, and in a culture, which still observed a sacrificial system where priests made atonement for the sins of the people at the temple. It is the Biblical root for what came to be called the “*priesthood of all believers.*”

If you keep on reading Romans 12:4-8, it becomes clear that Paul is not arguing for a leaderless Church, but rather for a way of following Jesus where everyone, literally *everyone*, has something to give.

¹ [Open Source Church: Making Room for the Wisdom of All](#) by Landon Whitsitt, Copyright ©2011, Alban Institute.

² Romans 12:1. *New Revised Standard Version*. Copyright © 1989 the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

I love Eugene Peterson's paraphrase of Romans 8:1 in *The Message*:
*"Take your everyday, ordinary life—your sleeping, eating, going-to-work, and walking-around life—and place it before God as an offering."*³

I want you to consider what it might look like if every follower of Jesus did that - and had our gifts, our abilities and our creativity *unleashed*. Can you imagine that kind of energy that would set free in the church?

And Paul continues by telling us that the Church is not the only one who would benefit. Look at verse two, *"Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect."*⁴

Again, I find Gene Peterson's fresh language in *The Message* useful:
*"Embracing what God does for you is the best thing you can do for him. (I love that) Don't become so well-adjusted to your culture that you fit into it without even thinking. Instead, fix your attention on God."*⁵

I don't know about you, but I need that reminder. It's worth considering that as much as I enjoy college football, the Chiefs (4-0, baby), or the latest movie or restaurant – living my life for God is even more important.

Paul, in verse three, also cautions against arrogance – Don't *"think of yourself more highly than you ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned."*⁶

I get it. It isn't just about what I think, or you think, or our ideas. We need faith and one another. *Someone needs to send a memo to Washington!*

But Gene Peterson puts a more positive spin on the text that I hadn't ever considered: *"Readily recognize what he wants from you, and quickly respond to it... ..God (will) bring the best out of you."*⁷

That's a powerful promise. Respond to God, seek fully to live for him, and God will bring the best out of you. **Wow, what a promise to live by.**

³ Romans 12:1. *The Message*. Copyright © 1993, 1994, 1995, 1996, 2000, 2001, 2002 by Eugene H. Peterson

⁴ Op. Cit. Romans 12:2. *New Revised Standard Version*.

⁵ Op. Cit. Romans 12:2. *The Message*.

⁶ Op. Cit. Romans 12:3. *New Revised Standard Version*.

⁷ Op. Cit. Romans 12:3. *The Message*.

Imagine what it might look like if we all did that? Long-time members and new folks – clergy and staff and our leaders and everyone else.

I think it would look something like an “open source Church.” I think it would be nothing less than amazing if the followers of Jesus weren’t just about *going* to Church – but more about *being* the Church.

I think, for some, it would sound like a risky approach, a radical embrace of trust, and, to quote Landon Whitsitt, if we took it seriously it would “scare the crud” out of some people, even Church hierarchy. Why, you might ask?

Churches are, generally speaking, like most institutions, incredibly risk adverse. But Paul says that true religion – true spirituality - at its core trusts in God and takes risks in stride. Trust is part of the DNA of true spirituality.

What if it became the DNA of the way we do church? *What if we...*

Activated spiritual growth. What will take us, spiritually, to the next level?
Creatively used our campus. How can we better use our beautiful building?
Took the Church to the people. And made even more of a difference?
Shared God’s story. And became excited about letting people know?

It’s a new idea about how to do Church. But it is also a really old idea. It’s a Biblical idea. It’s also kind of a *Methodist* thing to do.

Today is *World Communion Sunday*. Christians all over the world will be celebrating Holy Communion today. Really, a lot of the rest of us are today joining Roman Catholics, Anglicans, Orthodox Christians and the Disciples of Christ – all of whom celebrate communion every Sunday.

But we Methodists have something distinctive to contribute to communion. Do you know what it is? Of all the world’s Christians we offer something rare – a *truly open table*! Where all are welcome. Young and old. Members and non-members. Methodists and non-Methodists. Actually anyone, even those who don’t yet or don’t really believe. That’s right. *A truly open table.*

Where did the Methodists get that idea? From Jesus. From the New Testament. From the early Church. It’s a vision of a Church where...

Every voice can be heard; every person is valued; and we’re in it together.
May God grant us that kind of vision! Amen.