

Pastor's Message
August 30, 2020

Hi Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Hope you are all doing well!!

This week we continue reflecting on Paul's letter to the Corinthians as he talks about our call to be generous givers of our time, talents and resources. Throughout this sermon series, let us listen to the words of Paul letter, as if this letter was written to our group of friends, to our group of colleagues or to our group of sisters and brothers in Christ to see what advice Paul has to offer for us in these challenging times.

Hope to see you tomorrow.

God's Peace!

Pastor Denise

2 Corinthians 8:1-15

A reading from the 8th chapter of 2nd Corinthians.

8 1-4 Now, friends, I want to report on the surprising and generous ways in which God is working in the churches in Macedonia province. Fierce troubles came down on the people of those churches, pushing them to the very limit.

The trial exposed their true colors: They were incredibly happy, though desperately poor. The pressure triggered something totally unexpected: an outpouring of pure and generous gifts.

I was there and saw it for myself. They gave offerings of whatever they could—far more than they could afford!—pleading for the privilege of helping out in the relief of poor Christians.

5-7 This was totally spontaneous, entirely their own idea, and caught us completely off guard. What explains it was that they had first given

themselves unreservedly to God and to us.

The other giving simply flowed out of the purposes of God working in their lives. That's what prompted us to ask Titus to bring the relief offering to your attention, so that what was so well begun could be finished up.

You do so well in so many things—you trust God, you're articulate, you're insightful, you're passionate, you love us—now, do your best in this, too.

8-9 I'm not trying to order you around against your will. But by bringing in the Macedonians' enthusiasm as a stimulus to your love, I am hoping to bring the best out of you.

You are familiar with the generosity of our Master, Jesus Christ. Rich as he was, he gave it all away for us—in one stroke he became poor and we became rich.

10-20 So here's what I think: The best thing you can do right now is to finish what you started last year and not let those good intentions grow stale.

Your heart's been in the right place all along. You've got what it takes to finish it up, so go to it. Once the commitment is clear, you do what you can, not what you can't. The heart regulates the hands.

This isn't so others can take it easy while you sweat it out. No, you're shoulder to shoulder with them all the way, your surplus matching their deficit, their surplus matching your deficit. In the end you come out even.

As it is written,

Nothing left over to the one with the most,

Nothing lacking to the one with the least.

Grace and Peace to you from God our Father and Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior.
AMEN

With this week's reading from 2nd Corinthians, we will wrap up our reflections on the words that Paul wrote to the church in Corinth. A church that I think we can agree was going through some growing pains as they maneuvered through the struggles of becoming a mature and faithful Christian community.

In these last few weeks, we have heard Paul talk about forgiveness and reconciliation, about the treasure of the gospel and our call to be messengers to spread this precious word, about the challenges that we face because living out this gospel message contradicts the way of the world and therefore we have to put our trust in God to guide us.

And in this portion of the letter, we hear Paul talk about generosity as a gift from God working through us, which when nurtured and valued transforms us.

Paul starts by telling the folks in Corinth about the amazing encounter with generosity that the church in Macedonia had experienced.

To back track a little for a little context for this story, the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem had suffered tremendous loss and persecution following the second destruction of the temple by the Romans. Most of the followers of Jesus, who remained in the city, lived in extreme poverty with very few available resources.

The communities of faith in the outlying regions had promised to support these Jewish Christians in Jerusalem by collecting money and resources for them. One of the responsibilities of the missionaries that visited these faith communities was to collect these gifts and transport them back to Jerusalem.

So in this part of the letter, Paul is writing to the Corinthians and telling them of the response from the

churches in the Macedonia province to the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem.

Paul tells the Corinthians that although the followers in the Macedonia churches were encountering great hardship and were at this point in time desperately poor, they choose to honor their commitment to their brothers and sisters in Jerusalem with an outpouring of generous gifts.

In spite of their meager resources, they saw this commitment to honor their pledge as a privilege and a concrete means to display their gratefulness for all that God had given them. The Macedonians trusted in God to guide and provide for them as they committed themselves to this outpouring of generosity.

The Macedonians were no longer looking inward. They were no longer caught up in their misfortune, but instead focused on the needs of others, trusting in God and opening themselves up to what God could and would do through them.

They acknowledged the amazing grace that they had received from God through the gift of God's beloved Son, Jesus and were eager to do God's kingdom work of sharing God's grace with those in need. And in so doing, it allowed them to be God's presence to their brothers and sisters in need in Jerusalem, even though they had never met them.

The church in Corinth had made a similar commitment, but got sidetracked with many of the relationship challenges and growing pains that they were encountering. The Corinthians had turned their focus inward and they felt they no longer had the resources to honor their commitment to help the struggling Christians in Jerusalem.

Paul is urging the Corinthians to reconsider the choices they have made and to recommit themselves to this ministry. Paul urges them to not just share their resources, but to trust in God and allow God to work through them to help their brothers and sisters in need. Not out of a sense of duty, but as a response to the grace

that God had bestowed on them and their community.

This is another aspect of our Christian walk that is in so many ways counter cultural for us in this day and age. For Paul is urging the Corinthians to not focus on their own needs, but on the needs of others. In other words not to give with what they have left over, but to give to those in need first, feed the 5000 even when you don't think you have enough for yourselves.

This kind of action challenges us to live our lives from the perspective that there is not only enough for all, but that there is more than enough for all. As the gospel writers tell us that – not only were the 5000 fed, but there were plenty of fish and loaves left over after all had been fed.

And just as God worked through the disciples on the hillside to feed the 5000+ people with 2 loaves and 5 fish, God will work through us to feed and take care of all God's children.

And we here at Good Shepherd have experienced that kind of kingdom generosity first hand, as we have engaged in ministry projects to buy wells and farms through our VBS projects, as we have collected winter coats and accessories, as we have collected personal care items for Mary's Shelter and the Hope Rescue mission, and as we work side by side with our neighborhood churches to distribute food to the hungry, and in doing so we experience God working through us to spread the good news of the Gospel that we have been loved by God and in response to that love, we are called to love and take care of our neighbors in need.

Our God is generous beyond our wildest imagination. We have heard the stories that Jesus told – about the vineyard owner paying all of his workers a day's wages whether they worked an hour or the whole day, the father celebrating his wayward son's return with a huge feast at which he served the finest meat, and the farmer sowing seed here there and everywhere, some even being a treat for the birds.

Generous giving is the way that our God demonstrates his love for us, his beloved children. Generous giving to God's beloved children who have done nothing to earn it and that's what God's amazing grace is about: bestowing on the beneficiaries what they could never earn on their own, bestowing on the beneficiaries what they don't really deserve, and generously bestowing these gifts on the beneficiaries, which is all us, just because we are God's beloved.

The gospel writer John tells us that God calls us to love one another as God has first loved us.

That is to be generous givers of our time, our talents and our resources. So that all, our neighbors who live around the corner and our neighbors on the other side of the world, may get to know of the love, the grace, and the mercy of our God who works through us to bring about God's kingdom here on Earth just as it is in heaven.

AMEN

Blessing

Neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers,
nor things present, nor things to come,
nor powers, nor height, nor depth,
nor anything else in all creation,
will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus.
God, the creator, † Jesus, the Christ,
and the Holy Spirit, the comforter,
bless you and keep you in eternal love.

Amen.

