



Saint John United Methodist Church
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Message for November 1, 2020
“The Grace of Giving: Rich Generosity”
Speaker: Pastor Tom Grieb
Scripture: II Corinthians 8:1-7

Don't Rob Me of that Privilege

Years ago at the very first church I served, I remember visiting a lady on a bright and beautiful Saturday morning. Dorothy was a single lady of very limited means. Even though her pocketbook was limited, her heart was as big as any I've seen. Everyone in the church loved her.

The morning I stopped by I remember having a delightful conversation. We talked for about an hour in her meager upstairs apartment. As I prepared to leave, she reached into her purse and pulled out a couple of quarters to give to the church.

I tried to dissuade her, thinking the meager sum could be better used to help meet the needs of her own life. She would hear nothing of it. *“I want to give,”* she said, *“don't rob me of that privilege.”* I have never forgotten her response.

For Dorothy, giving was a privilege. Giving sacrificially was an even greater privilege. I learned a lot that morning. Let's read about that privilege as we turn to the scripture. Our passage for today is II Corinthians 8:1-7.

2 Corinthians 8:1-7

And now, brothers and sisters, we want you to know about the grace that God has given the Macedonian churches. In the midst of a very severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity. For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability. Entirely on their own, they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the Lord's people. And they exceeded our expectations: They gave themselves first of all to the Lord, and then by the will of God also to us. So we urged Titus, just as he had earlier made a beginning, to bring also to completion this act of grace on your part. But since you excel in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in complete earnestness and in the love we have kindled in you—see that you also excel in this grace of giving.

The Privilege of Giving

In our passage for today, Paul highlights a church that distinguished itself with its generosity. As Paul writes in II Corinthians 8:4 the Macedonian Church *“pleaded for the privilege of sharing.”* The church there was under duress. They were challenged by a degree of persecution. On top of that they were extremely poor.

In spite of all that, they counted it a privilege to give. In spite of the trials they were facing, their joy overflowed and welled up in *“rich generosity.”* They gave as much as they were able and even beyond, much like my buddy, Doris.

The context of today's passage surrounds an offering that Paul took in support of the saints in Jerusalem. They too had fallen on hard times. As Paul made his rounds from church to church he collected this offering. Paul even involved others like Titus in that collection.

The offering was a really big deal for Paul. He knew it was a big deal for the churches as well. Paul knew that giving was an important part of being church. Giving has always been an important part of the church's witness. God's people have always been challenged to give.

Even though the church in Macedonia was of limited means, they gave abundantly. They counted it a privilege to give. Giving for them was a real blessing. Their example was an inspiration throughout the church.

Paul was quick to bring to light the fact that the Macedonians gave first to the Lord and then to others. Their generosity was an expression of gratitude for what God was doing in their lives, hence their giving was to God first and to others second. There was a very direct correlation between the grace God had so generously heaped upon them and their desire to give.

A Matter of Grace

God's blessings are abundant. We share in those blessings all the time. God's provisions are many. We experience them daily. God cares for our every need.

All of this is a matter of grace. The free gift of God's amazing grace is an expression of love that has profound effect upon us. If our hearts are so inclined, it's all too easy to be overwhelmed by God's love and find ourselves returning that love not only God's way, but toward others.

That was the sort of thing that was going on with the Macedonians. The church in Macedonia pleaded for the opportunity to give. They not only wanted to give, they needed to give as an expression of their deep and abiding love for God.

As God gives and gives and gives again, we can't help but turn and give as well. This too is a matter of grace. The grace of giving is a privilege indeed.

Excel in the Grace of Giving

In our passage for today, Paul goes to great lengths to highlight the church in Macedonia and their generosity, only to encourage the church in Corinth toward the same sort of generosity. In comparison to the church in Macedonia, the one in Corinth was well off. It was more cosmopolitan. In a way, the whole world came through Corinth. Corinth, after all, was a bustling seaport.

The church there had already given to the offering Paul was taking, but because of some inner strife they failed to complete what they initially intended to do. And so, Paul highlights the generosity of the Macedonian Church to spur them along. The church in Macedonia was an amazing example of the dynamic difference God's grace can make in the lives and attitudes of people when it comes to giving. Their example persists to this day.

I like what Paul says about those in Corinth. While encouraging them to give, he also encourages them about their spiritual lives. In spite of their shortcomings, the church in Corinth had a lot of things in place. Paul is quick to commend them. He makes note of the ways in which they excelled—*"in their faith, in speech, in knowledge, and in complete earnestness."* They were faithful stewards in every way.

The right use of time and talent is every bit a matter of stewardship as is the right use of money. Paul appreciated the way they had thrown themselves into the faith. Their “*earnestness*” in this regard had not gone unnoticed. In fact, Paul recognized that giving oneself to the Lord first is the foundation upon which all Christian giving comes.

Since the Corinthians had excelled in so many ways, it was not at all a stretch for Paul to ask them to excel in “*the grace of giving.*”

The Grace of Giving

We’ll be hearing a lot over the next three weeks about “*the grace of giving.*” Think about it, it is a gift to be able to give.

When we give:

- We take the focus off ourselves and put it on someone else and, more importantly, we put it on God.
- We are released from the hold money and possessions can have.
- We at once recognize the one whose blessings are showered upon us.
- We recognize that God is “*the giver of every good and perfect gift.*”
- We find ourselves blessed by the very grace that is the reason for our giving in the first place.

“*The grace of giving*” is more than matched by the grace of God.

For me, giving is one of the greatest joys of my life. It is an honor and privilege to give to the furtherance of God’s Kingdom.

Our Present Circumstance

Everyone is all astir about the economy these days and for good reason. Because of the pandemic the stock market is sort of a bouncing ball—up one day, down the other. There is sort of a split personality to what’s going on these days. Some have not been so much affected, while others have. We have come through a lot, but realize we have a long way to go. There are far too many unemployed, far too many who have been adversely affected, and far too many who have suffered.

We live with all these concerns and let them affect us when it comes to our giving. We’d do well to remember the Macedonian Church gave with “*rich generosity*” in the midst of “*severe trial.*”

God’s Provision

This past year has taught me a great deal about God’s provision.

The middle of March I had no idea what was going to happen. God has moved in our midst and I am thankful to report that we are very much head above water when it comes to the finances of this church. We have made it through quite a bit this year.

With the pandemic still lingering and the rather daunting prospecting of 2021 looming, let me challenge you, just like Paul challenged the church in Corinth, to “*complete*” what you first began.

Jesus Is With Us All the Way

A couple of weeks ago Cheryl and I were both touched by something we read in the daily devotional, *Jesus Calling* by Sarah Young. It spoke volumes to the anxiety we have sometimes felt, and, I am sure, you have felt.

Writing as if Jesus is talking Young writes, *"Anxiety is the result of envisioning the future without Me."*

So then let's affirm that Jesus is with us all the way. He has this and will provide all along. *"I am with you. I am with you. I am with you always, even to the end of the age,"* says Jesus.

Let's Pray

So then let's pray.

This week you will receive a prayer card along with a letter from me encouraging you to do just that. On that prayer card is a prayer that hopefully will help center you to the extent that you will hear from God and get a sense of how he wants you to respond when it comes to your financial commitment to the church. More importantly, I hope it helps center you in the fact that Christ is with you and will see you through.

Let's pray that prayer together.

"God, your grace has been poured out for us and you love us abundantly. May your love overflow from our hearts into our words, our actions, and our giving. Lead us to be faithful stewards who boldly respond to the great gifts you have given us and let us share that grace, the grace you freely give to all who love you, in the giving of our talents, time, and resource. You do not hold back. And so God, we pray for the courage and the faithfulness to not hold back either. We give to your Kingdom so that your love will be evident throughout our church, our community, and our world."