

Sermon for August 5, 2012 - 10th Sunday after Pentecost

2 Corinthians 9:6-11

Theme: **Don't be afraid to give.**

- 1) *His Word is able to supply your every need*
- 2) *Your gift supplies his word to others.*

⁶ Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. ⁷ Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. ⁸ And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work. ⁹ As it is written: "He has scattered abroad his gifts to the poor; his righteousness endures forever." ¹⁰ Now he who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will also supply and increase your store of seed and will enlarge the harvest of your righteousness. ¹¹ You will be made rich in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God.

There are two great reasons why people don't give generously to Church or charity. One reason is selfishness. Some people consider a comfortable, easy life more important than the Gospel. This is why they easily skip worship and give next to nothing to support the ministry of their congregation. These people are in danger of replacing the LORD with another god called "self". If such an attitude is left unchecked, it will lead to a loss of faith and salvation.

But that's a topic for another sermon or Bible class. The other reason people don't give generously, which will be the topic of our sermon, is fear. Fear of what? Fear that if we give too much, we might not have enough money to support our family and ourselves. It is scary having next to nothing, and then giving it up, trusting that God will somehow provide. The unemployed, the underemployed, struggling families – they have all felt this very real fear at one time or another.

What kind of giving does God expect of us? What if you don't have enough to give and live on? These are some of the questions we will attempt to answer in today's sermon under the theme: **Don't be afraid to give.** 1) *His Word is able to supply your every need.* 2) *Your gift supplies His Word to others.*

Part One: *His Word is able to supply your every need*

Our sermon text is part of a longer discourse on charitable giving found in 2 Corinthians 8 and 9. The Christians in Jerusalem were facing a famine. The apostle Paul made this known to the Gentile churches and Corinth was one of the first to promise support. Paul, in this letter, encourages the Corinthians to make good on their promises – not because they have too, but out of love for God and their fellow brothers and sisters in the faith who are suffering.

The Corinthians faced a very real fear: if they generously gave their money to support the Christians in Jerusalem, what would happen to them if the famine spread or they lost their jobs or health? Most people in the ancient world lived hand to mouth. They did not have the "expendable income" that many of us are blessed to have today.

Paul confronts their fear with an illustration: ⁶ Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously.

There were no "seed farms" in Paul's day. A farmer would save some of the grain from the previous harvest to plant his fields. Now imagine a farmer who is afraid of bad weather. He might be tempted to hold back the seed he sows. Why? Because he is afraid that he will not have anything if the harvest is bad. If that farmer acts on his fear, his harvest – no matter how good or bad the weather is – will be little.

But the farmer who simply trusts in God to provide and sows generously? He, with God's blessing, will have a large harvest. So too the person who generously gives to others out of love for God. Such giving pleases God because it is an act of faith in the LORD's love and providence.

Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.

God does not care about the gift in the plate. He cares about the attitude of the heart. God does not like gifts that are given "reluctantly" – that is, gifts that are given and then regretted. Imagine the person who gives a sizeable contribution and afterwards bemoans the fact that he gave so much to the Church. "Oh, what I could have done with that money. How I wish I had it back." If you wish you had it back, then don't give it in the first place.

God also does not like gifts that are given under compulsion, when a person is shamed into making a contribution and made to feel guilty if he doesn't. Church leaders, therefore, have to be careful not to motivate giving through fear and guilt.

The bottom line is this: God doesn't want your money. He wants your heart. He wants to see that you hold him as your greatest love and focus in life. He wants to see that you care for others as he cares for you. This is why he takes pleasure in those who give thought to their giving – who carefully consider their income, and joyfully set aside a generous portion of their income to support the Gospel and help others.

Now it should be said that "joyful giving" is not a natural thing for a person to do. We all have a selfish nature that strives to keep our money and use it to serve ourselves. It is not natural to cheerfully and generously contribute to Church. But God himself works in the heart of the Christian to exhibit such great faith and love, as we see in the next verse:

And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work.

God loves us. He loves us so much that He sent his Son to save us by dying for all our sins. Now think about this: if God *did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all--how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?* (Romans 8:32). We can be confident that – no matter how much we give away, God will supply us with everything we need and more to accomplish his will for our life.

Parents: if your son or daughter took their allowance and gave it all to help someone who was desperately in need, would you stop providing them with food, shelter and all that they need? No, of course not. You might actually be inclined to reward them for their love.

Now if this is how we would react to such generous giving by our children, how do you think our heavenly Father will treat us for sharing our material possessions with those in need, and supporting the ministry of the Gospel with our offerings? Do you think he'll let us starve? Do you think he would say to the angels: "Look at John supporting the Gospel and giving all he has to the poor out of love for me. Well, that wasn't smart. Looks like he ruined his life and I won't help him?" No! If we give to others out of love of God, trusting in His providence and salvation, He will be pleased. He will consider this deed an act of righteousness and he will bless us.

Now, it should be noted that the blessings he blesses us with are not necessarily financial in nature. It could be contentment with less, spiritual joy and understanding, clothes that don't wear out, etc., etc. . . . He may even allow us to struggle, but he will never abandon us, as the Psalmist writes: *I was young and now I am old, yet I have never seen the righteous forsaken or their children begging bread.* ²⁶ *They are always generous and lend freely; their children will be blessed.* (Psalm 37:25-26) You see the Christian understands that: *man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD.* (Deuteronomy 8:3)

Think of the other Scripture lessons for today: did God let his loved ones starve, even though they had no food or means to provide for themselves? No, by the power of his word he provided for them! And it is by the power of his word that he sustains us both spiritually and physically so that we can continue to show love to others, as he promises through St. Paul: *Now he who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will also supply and increase your store of seed and will*

enlarge the harvest of your righteousness.¹¹ You will be made rich in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God.

Giving generously is an act of faith. It shows that God is our first love and priority in life. It shows that we are truly concerned for our fellow man. It is an exercise of trust that God will provide. When a Christian cheerfully sacrifices a sizeable portion of his income to Church and charity, God will make sure His dear child will have everything He needs for life and more. Every Christian can trust this, and yet, we sadly often do not.

How sad it is that we worry about our finances. We think: "If only I had more money I could give more money." But God does not want our money. He wants our heart: our trust and love. "Lord, forgive our doubting hearts and unfounded fears. You have never left nor forsaken us and you never will. As we consider how you demonstrated your absolute love for us in Christ Jesus, move us to trust you boldly and never be afraid to give generously out of love for you."

Part Two: *Your gift supplies his word to others.*

There is one more thing I would like to say about your generous giving, and it is found in the last verse of our text. Paul tells the Corinthians: *through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God.*

When Paul brought the charity he collected from the Corinthians to the Church in Jerusalem, it certainly did result in thanksgiving to God. The saints in Jerusalem were saved from starvation. They got to experience firsthand the beautiful fellowship they had around the world. This gift fostered great peace and unity among the Jewish and Gentile Christians. It helped the Gospel spread.

Your generosity also results in thanksgiving to God. Through your offerings you are visiting the sick, calling back the straying, making sure that Gospel is preached in Kewaunee, teaching children God's Word, sharing Christ to those who do not know him, instructing new pastors and teachers, and sending missionaries to people who have never heard of Jesus.

And your generosity results in thanksgiving to God. I have heard many people praise God for the generosity of those who sent missionaries. I remember a gentleman in Canada once telling me: "I thank God that you are here. We are a godless nation and we need the Gospel. I thank God you are here." And just think: it is your generosity that sent the Gospel to Canada, Russia, Japan, Africa – all around the world. It is through your generosity that souls are snatched from Satan, and the Kingdom of Christ continues to march into all the world

Brothers and sisters in Christ: **Don't be afraid to give.** *By his powerful word God will supply your every need. Your generous giving supplies His word to others. Amen.*