

Sermon for July 29, 2018 - 10th Sunday after Pentecost

2 Corinthians 9:8-11 (EHV)

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

- 1) *God enables our giving*
- 2) *God blesses our giving.*

⁸ *God is able to make all grace overflow to you, so that in all things, at all times, having all that you need, you will overflow in every good work.* ⁹*As it is written: He scattered; he gave to the poor. His righteousness remains forever.* ¹⁰*And he who provides seed to the sower and bread for food will provide and multiply your seed for sowing, and will increase the harvest of your righteousness.* ¹¹*You will be made rich in every way so that you may be generous in every way, which produces thanksgiving to God through us.*

I am ashamed to admit it, but my heart drops a little every time I get of phone call or visitor at the door asking for financial assistance. Why? Partly because my selfish, sinful nature wants to hold on to my possessions. It does not like giving things away. The other reason is that I am “afraid” that I might not have enough for myself if I give a sizeable amount of money to someone else. Who’s to say that something bad won’t happen to my family and that I won’t need that money in the near future? Besides all this, people sometimes come to me with very large requests that I simply am unable to fulfill. What help will the little that I am actually able to give be to the person in need?

But then I read the lessons for this Sunday, and they strike at my heart. Not only do they address my excuses for not wanting to help others, but they also give me the Gospel motivation to want to use my physical blessings to help.

With the apostle Paul as our guide, let us consider these things, under the theme: **Don't be afraid to give.** 1) *God enables our giving.* 2) *God blesses our giving.*

Part One: God enables our giving

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 in Asia Minor 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 with today. On top of this, they had to wonder what good their little gift would be for the many in Jerusalem. Famines could last a long time. Would their gift actually be enough to help the Christians in Jerusalem?

The apostle Paul confronts their fear with a promise: ⁸ *God is able to make all grace overflow to you, so that in all things, at all times, having all that you need, you will overflow in every good work.*

Our God is full of compassion and mercy – so much so that he gave up his greatest and best (his only begotten Son) in order to rescue us from the hell our sins had earned. Now, if God *did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also graciously give us all things along with him?* (Romans 8:32 EHV).

And that is exactly what God promises to do for us: *God is able to make all grace overflow to you, so that in all things, at all times, having all that you need, you will overflow in every good work.*

Did you notice that the words “all” and “every” are used 5 times in this one little verse? God is making a point. We don’t have to worry about anything, because God gives us everything we need to fulfill his purposes for our lives. No matter what circumstances we might face in life, God will make sure that we have everything we need – not only for ourselves, but also to help our neighbor who might be in need.

And understand this: “having all that you need” does not merely refer to an abundance of material or financial blessings. Many people have that and are still unable to help others, because their heart is not in the right place. People are naturally selfish. They don’t want to give to others, unless they see some sort of benefit in it for themselves.

For this reason the LORD not only supplies Christians with the means to help others, but, more importantly, with the desire and motivation to do so. Christian charity is always an act of faith in the LORD. It should never be forced or exercised out of guilt, but always out of love. And it is God himself, who pours this love into our hearts by means of his Gospel. I mean, how can the good news of our salvation in Christ and the promise of the almighty God to take care of our every need not move us to share our blessings with those in need?

And as we grow in faith and love towards God, we will also grow in our giving – moved by love and trusting that, no matter how much we give away, the LORD will supply us with everything we need and more to accomplish his purposes in our lives.

Let me explain what I mean with an illustration: Parents: if your son or daughter gave up their entire allowance to help someone in need, would you stop providing them with food, shelter and the toys that they enjoy? No, of course not. You might actually be inclined to reward them for their love.

Now if this is how we would react to our children’s’ expressions of generosity, how do you think our heavenly Father will react when we use our material blessings to support the ministry of the

Gospel or give help to those in need? Do you think he says to the angels: “Look at him – giving his material possessions to those less fortunate than him out of love for me. What a fool! I think I’m going to let him starve”? No, of course not. Rather, God is pleased when we share our possessions with those in need out of love for him. Why? Because we are fulfilling his will and the purpose for which he gave those possessions to us, as the next verse of our text indicates: *He scattered; he gave to the poor. His righteousness remains forever.*

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 – mirroring the compassion God the Father has for his creation, all the while exercising trust in God’s promises to graciously provide for all our needs.

How sad it is, then, 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 hearts, that is to say, our trust and love. May this lead us to pray: “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 absolute love for us in Christ Jesus, move us to trust you and never be afraid to give generously to others out of love for you.”

Part Two: God blesses our giving.

The Scriptures are clear: God loves it when we give – so much so that he promises to graciously bless us for it!

Now, it should be noted that the blessings he promises us in response to our giving are not blessings we deserve. They are gracious gifts of a loving father. On top of this, they are not necessarily financial in nature. The blessings could be things like a joyful contentment with less, a greater spiritual understanding and joy over his will, clothes that don’t wear out, etc. . .

And the blessings he promises may not be given to us right away. He might, in His wisdom, allow us to struggle with difficulties or financial hardship right after we give in order to test and strengthen our faith in his promises. But there is one thing he will never do, and that is abandon us. 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 NIV84). You see, our existence is not dependent on our possessions, but on the LORD’s blessing – as the Scriptures say: *man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD.* (Deuteronomy 8:3 NIV84)

Think of the other two Scripture lessons for today (2 Kings 4:42-44 and John 6:1–15): 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 through the gifts of others – even though those gifts were, humanly speaking, not adequate enough to help! The LORD promises to use that same powerful word to spiritually and physically bless us in our giving so that our gift can continue to help others, as the apostle Paul states: *he who provides seed to the sower and bread for food will provide and multiply your seed for sowing, and will increase the harvest of your*

righteousness. ¹¹You will be made rich in every way so that you may be generous in every way, which produces thanksgiving to God through us.

When Paul brought the charity he collected from the Corinthians to the Church in Jerusalem, it certainly did result in thanksgiving to God. The LORD blessed that money to be just the right amount needed to save the saints in Jerusalem from starvation. They got to experience firsthand the beautiful fellowship they had with fellow Christians across the Roman world. The gift fostered greater peace and unity among Jewish and Gentile Christians. It helped the Gospel spread.

Your generosity also results in thanksgiving to God. Through your church offerings you are visiting the sick, evangelizing the lost, calling back the straying, teaching children God's Word, sharing Christ to those who do not know him, instructing new pastors and teachers, sending out missionaries, and making sure that the Gospel remains preached in Kewaunee. Whenever you donate money or food to humanitarian organizations like the Violence Intervention Project, Kewaunee's food or clothing pantries, Christian Aid and relief, or even the person who comes to your door looking for a little help, you are also giving to God by showing love to those who are in need. And your generosity results in thanksgiving to God for the love He shows through your charity.

For example, our Sunday School has been getting a lot of thankyou letters from the "New Beginnings" home in Milwaukee that they have been supporting through their Sunday School offering. Even though the money collected is not, comparatively speaking, all that much, the LORD has blessed it – using their offerings to help troubled and impoverished mothers and children find a safe place to live and the support they need for life. More importantly, these offerings provide an opportunity for these mothers and children to hear the Gospel - many of whom have come to faith in Christ, all to the praise of His name.

When I think about all these truths, then all the excuses my selfish, sinful heart gives for not giving to others don't hold much weight, do they? No, the LORD has given me every reason to want to share my blessings with others. Has he done the same for you?

Brothers and sisters in Christ: **Don't be afraid to give.** Why not? Because God not only enables us to share our blessings with others, he also blesses our sharing – all to the glory of his name. May these truths move our hearts to compassion – especially when people are in need – that, clinging to his promise to provide, we may joyfully share with others the blessings God has entrusted to our care. Amen.