

Give It Away!

Meditation on 2 Corinthians 9:6-15

Nov. 19, 2017

Merritt Island Presbyterian Church

“⁶The point is this: the one who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and the one who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. ⁷Each of you must give as you have made up your mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. ⁸And God is able to provide you with every blessing in abundance, so that by always having enough of everything, you may share abundantly in every good work. ⁹As it is written, ‘He scatters abroad, he gives to the poor; his righteousness endures for ever.’ ¹⁰He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness. ¹¹You will be enriched in every way for your great generosity, which will produce thanksgiving to God through us; ¹²for the rendering of this ministry not only supplies the needs of the saints but also overflows with many thanksgivings to God. ¹³Through the testing of this ministry you glorify God by your obedience to the confession of the gospel of Christ and by the generosity of your sharing with them and with all others, ¹⁴while they long for you and pray for you because of the surpassing grace of God that he has given you. ¹⁵Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!”

We had a great crowd for our annual Thanksgiving dinner last Sunday! Our church family filled up the fellowship hall. We enjoyed one another's company and ate delicious food. Thank you to all who came and brought side dishes and desserts that made our meal truly a feast! Many thanks to our Fellowship committee and others who generously gave of themselves, laboring Saturday and Sunday to set up, prepare the main dishes, serve, wash dishes and clean up. When Jim and I left after Praise Band rehearsal Sunday night--the lights were still on in the fellowship hall kitchen. The workers' cars were still parked outside.

Then on Friday, Tammy and Robyn, our preschool director and her assistant, and Pat, our elder who serves the preschool, got up before

dawn to prepare for the preschool's Thanksgiving dinner. Carl got up early, too, and came to help cook, serve and clean up. The program for families started at 11 with 3, 4 and 5 year olds parading in, wearing paper bag costumes they had made that morning. They lined up on the stage and sang to the tune of *Frere Jacques*: "Mr. Turkey. Mr. Turkey. Big and Fat. Big and Fat. I am going to eat you. I am going to eat you. Just like that! Just like that!" And they sang, "Count your blessings, name them one by one..." They led us in a prayer of thanksgiving.

Then it was time to eat and fellowship with one another. Parents and grandparents told me they hadn't expected such an event--so elaborate a meal, so large a gathering, so sweet a program. I think they hadn't expected the generosity of spirit. Many times in the day, Tammy said, she was so filled with love and joy, she fought back tears. "It was an amazing blessing from God," she said.

The funny thing was that Pat, Tammy and Robyn worried that they wouldn't have enough food. When the dinner was over, the serving tables were still loaded with food, and there was more in the oven! So they decided to give the remaining food to Ambassador Christian Academy. This is the K-12 charter school for students with special needs with whom we share our facilities and grounds.

Pat sent me a note to tell me what happened when they invited ACA: "First the football players came and heaped their plates with food. When they were finished, they folded all the chairs, put them in the Annex and thanked us for the food. The teacher told us that, for many of these children, this will be the only Thanksgiving meal they will have. After the football team, the teachers invited different groups to

come and fix a plate of food. They were all so polite and thanked us for the food.”

When everyone had eaten, there was still a lot of turkey, mashed potatoes, gravy, corn, rolls, macaroni and cheese, and pies! So they gave it to the school to freeze and serve to the students later.

“ Many of these children do not have food and are hungry,” Pat said. “... Tammy, Robyn and I felt so good about sharing our food. What a wonderful shared experience that was for the 2 schools. Sometimes we are so anxious to help others, but forget the need right in our own backyard!”

I was so happy and proud that Robyn, Tammy and Pat had shared our abundance with students and staff of ACA--and brought them joy and nourishment. Although I wasn't there to hear what ACA's administrator said about the preschool sharing their feast with them, I know Joy well enough to guess.

“Praise God!” she'd say of the gift of love and grace and the faith that stirred us to give. “Thank you, Lord!”

Then she'd look for a way to pass it on.

Our epistle lesson in 2 Corinthians today is also a thanksgiving celebration, with the promise that the harvest is rich for those who sow bountifully. Sow sparingly and you will reap sparingly. That makes sense, doesn't it? If you don't plant, what's going to grow in your garden? Anything of value? Just weeds. In the apostle Paul's agriculturally-based society, the sight of sowers, scattering seeds by

hand is commonplace. “Ahh,” they would say at this analogy, nodding their heads. This passage brings to mind Jesus sending out his disciples to minister in his name, to sow seeds and make disciples. Jesus says in Matthew 9:37, “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore, ask the Lord of the harvest to send out more laborers in the harvest.” Paul’s reference to sowing seeds is in a different context, but with the same desired outcome of building the Kingdom! His sowing seeds is providing financial support to help other brothers and sisters in the faith do ministry. He is inviting the relatively wealthy (mostly Gentile) Corinthian church to help the Mother Church--Jewish Christians in Jerusalem, struggling with poverty and persecution.

Will the Gentile Christians be anxious to give to the Jewish Christians? That’s a good question. For Gentile Christians were not always accepted by Jewish Christians in the 1st Century Church. They lived in separate communities and had a long history of animosity toward each other. So Paul has a challenge--not only because he is asking for money and it’s human nature to want to hold onto our worldly wealth and want to accumulate more, but because he is asking Gentiles to give money to Jews.

Other challenges for this fundraising campaign include the problem of the Corinthians’ wealth. It could actually get in the way of their giving! Just because a congregation has money doesn’t mean they will give more to the poor than a church with less. Generosity comes from faith in a generous and gracious God. Generosity is a fruit of the Spirit, Paul says in Galatians 5:22, a gift from God, he says in Romans 12:8.

God's grace is evident in the generosity of the Macedonian churches, he says in 2 Cor. 8, who were not wealthy, but gave as if they were. They gave, in spite of "severe affliction," "their abundant joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity...For, as I can testify, they voluntarily gave according to their means, and *even beyond their means*, begging us earnestly for the privilege of sharing in this ministry of the saints..."

Paul anticipates resistance to his invitation for the Corinthians to give to another church. He uses Scripture--Proverbs and other Wisdom books--to support his argument. *7Each of you must give as you have made up your mind,* he says in verse 7, *"not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver."* He argues for the benefits of giving for the giver. While we usually interpret these as spiritual blessings, such as peace and faith, Paul doesn't rule out material blessings. But everything we have, we must be willing to share. For it has been given to us to bring glory to God and to grow the Kingdom. He says in verse 8: *8And God is able to provide you with every blessing in abundance, so that by always **having enough of everything**, you may share abundantly in every good work.* *10He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness* *11 You will be enriched in every way,* he goes on in verse 11, *"for your great generosity."*

What strikes me in this stewardship passage is Paul's emphasis on the unity of the Body of Christ, expressed in our prayers for one another, our longing and love for one another, and our willingness to share our resources for the sake of the gospel. Giving generously to help the

faithful is not just a nice thing to do, an act of compassion; it is an act of worship, and emerges from our relationship with the Lord. Giving *generously* brings glory to God and produces “*thanksgiving to God through us.*”

For whenever Christians receive a precious gift, we recognize that “Every generous act of giving, with every perfect gift, is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change.” (James 1:17) We know God uses friends, family, neighbors, and strangers to be vessels of blessings, instruments of God’s grace and love. And what do the faithful say when something wonderful happens?

“Praise God!” and, “Thank you, Lord!”

On Saturday, more saints gathered at our church to labor for the Lord. They cleaned and painted our fellowship hall. They gave generously of themselves, without expecting anything in return. They gave because they love their church! And they want to welcome the world to come inside, come and experience friendship. Come and experience the love and grace of our Lord! For we have been blessed by the indescribable gift of God. And we want to pass it on!

The Kids Klub say it best in their Christmas Program, when they sing, “Give it away, for Christ has come. Give it away, joy for ev’ryone! Love came down for all, peace for great and small.... God gave his son, Hope for eve’ryone. We cannot keep it quiet anymore. We’ve gotta give it away!”

Let us pray.

Holy One, we thank you for your love and grace and your indescribable gift to us--salvation through belief on your Son. We thank you for calling us to minister for you and providing us with opportunities to give generously from the many blessings you have given us. Help us, Lord, to let go of worldly cares and belongings and trust you--that you will supply all our needs and that we will always have enough of everything. Build up our faith so that we won't hesitate to share abundantly in every good work--to scatter abroad and give to the poor, for your righteousness will endure forever. Make us cheerful givers! Produce in us the joy of thanksgiving. May we always sing your praises and give you thanks for every good and perfect gift that comes from above. In Christ we pray. Amen.