

June 28, 2015
Sermon The Fifth Sunday after Pentecost
St Peter Lutheran Church
Bowie, TX
Larry Knobloch, Pastor
2 Corinthians 8:1-9, 13-15 (ESV)

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¹ We want you to know, brothers, about the grace of God that has been given among the churches of Macedonia, ² for in a severe test of affliction, their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part. ³ For they gave according to their means, as I can testify, and beyond their means, of their own accord, ⁴ begging us earnestly for the favor of taking part in the relief of the saints— ⁵ and this, not as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then by the will of God to us. ⁶ Accordingly, we urged Titus that as he had started, so he should complete among you this act of grace. ⁷ But as you excel in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in all earnestness, and in our love for you—see that you excel in this act of grace also. ⁸ I say this not as a command, but to prove by the earnestness of others that your love also is genuine. ⁹ For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich. ...

¹³ For I do not mean that others should be eased and you burdened, but that as a matter of fairness ¹⁴ your abundance at the present time should supply their need, so that their abundance may supply your need, that there may be fairness. ¹⁵ As it is written, “Whoever gathered much had nothing left over, and whoever gathered little had no lack.”

Grace, mercy and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ!

I've got a question for you:

Is the government too generous with your money?

That question is asked by members of Congress who check the federal budget.

Here are a few examples. In 2013, the State Department spent \$630,000 to attract followers to its Facebook and Twitter accounts.

NASA budgeted \$3 million to conduct annual weeklong seminars to explain to its employees how Congress works.

The U.S. Army spent almost \$300 million developing a mega-blimp for surveillance in Afghanistan and then scrapped the aircraft.

We get upset when we can't do anything about other people being overly generous with our hard-earned tax dollars. But we also can find it tough to be generous with the money we *do* control.

A college of mine sent out a survey in his congregation and shared some of the answers that came back: Some of the reasons listed about "why I'm not generous" were as follows:

One person says it's hard to be generous not having a job or the funds to contribute as I'd like to. Another writes about having fear of not being able to survive on a fixed income today. A third admits to being afraid that we won't have enough left to meet our bills and obligations.

If you and I are not generous, we feel we have our reasons.

Yet we hear the apostle Paul talk in our text about some poor Christians who “pleaded for the privilege” of being generous!

Now I’m not here to call anyone to task. I do not keep track of the giving amounts of anyone. That’s neither my job nor my concern.

But this is the Text that we are faced with today so let’s look at the top reasons in the survey that I mentioned earlier. Then we’ll see how Jesus shows God’s generosity . . . and how God can power our generosity even in tough times, how

God’s generosity feeds ours because we need God’s help in being generous.

Consider three reasons we may not be generous.

We may be afraid to give too much. What if I give too much now and then can’t get something or do something that I want to later. What if I have an unexpected expense, then what?

It’s natural to want to take care of self first. After all, Jesus says you are to “love your neighbor as [much as you love] yourself.” It’s amazing how we can make God’s Word work for us when we want to.

We are raised to think that we should be financially independent. We hear it from our parents as they groom us as we grow up to take care of ourselves and we assume that, under normal circumstances, will earn enough money to take care of ourselves and our families.

When we are watching every penny, it's hard to be generous knowing this means there's less for yourself . . . or your family. Usually we're afraid that if we give too much, we won't have enough left over for ourselves.

We may think we can't give enough to make a difference. The needs around us are so great; what we share seems so small. We're not just talking about money. We're talking about giving our time or using our talents and abilities.

You probably get requests asking for generous gifts to everything from the local food bank to helping children overseas to a foundation working to wipe out a killer disease. We might wonder whether what we give makes a difference for someone in need.

We may feel our generosity could be abused. You might offer your help and your generosity was refused. That makes it tough to be generous again in that situation.

Another noted that it's hard to be generous when you don't get a thank you in return. It's easy to stop sharing our resources with other people when we've seen our generosity misused or not appreciated.

You may be thinking, each of these reasons not to be generous has some truth in it. You'd be right. But that doesn't give us permission to let these reasons grow into excuses for not being generous at all.

One of devil's best tricks is to use half-truths to lead us to sin. That often happens with money or other blessings with which to be generous, when we

think or even say that it won't be appreciated any way so why bother being generous at all?

When you or I are not generous because of our selfishness, we sin. But just as Paul pushes us today to consider our generosity, the apostle provides help for growing in a generous spirit. He points us to this fact:

Jesus shows God's generosity to us.

Paul says in v 9: *"For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich."*

The apostle isn't talking about the facts that Jesus didn't have a lot of money and never owned a home.

Paul is talking about spiritual wealth. If sin is the spiritual debt we owe to God, then forgiveness earned for us by Jesus on the cross is the spiritual wealth by which He makes us rich.

Paul says more about this in Rom 5:8: *"But God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us."*

Yes God blesses us with earthly things like money and possessions, but that is only scratching the surface, in effect the little things in light of eternity.

We are each blessed greatly by God's generosity in giving Jesus to die, even though we don't deserve it.

That's why Jn 3:16 says God loved the world so much that he gave us only Son, Jesus Christ.

Not only does our heavenly Father give us everything, but then He helps us to be generous too!

With the Spirit working in us, we can be generous. We can give out of caring. Caring for our neighbor and giving from our substance, whether it be our treasures or of our time.

When we talk about generosity, we don't start with money. We start with what's in our heart. True generosity starts with a caring heart.

Paul says that those poverty-stricken Macedonians first gave themselves to the Lord (v 5). Then they pleaded for the privilege of helping others (v 4).

The English word "generous" comes from a French word meaning "of noble birth." Our generosity comes because we are of noble birth spiritually. We are children of the King, sisters and brothers of the Prince of Peace. We are God's children:

So . . . We give out of what we have.
Generosity isn't about amount, but attitude.

Some of you are familiar with the program, Worship for Shut-ins. In the chapel where they film their worship services there is a picture frame with a well worn dollar bill. They call it their widow's mite. A listener sent in \$1 because that's all she had.

That generous giver reminds us of what Paul says in v 12: *"For if the readiness is there, it is acceptable according to what a person has, not according to what he does not have."*

When we give generously, it doesn't matter how big or how little our gift is, compared to what others give.

We are generous because we care especially when we give out of what we have. Generosity is a gift from the heart.

We can give in thanks to God.

That's what the Macedonian Christians did. Paul writes in v 2: *"In a severe test of affliction, their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part."*

You could put a check for a million dollars in the offering plate, and if you are a billionaire, that might or might not be generous. Depending on your mindset and attitude, it might be your leftovers. You could also be giving a check for a million dollars trying to buy God's forgiveness. That wouldn't be generosity either.

Generosity comes from caring and trusting and thanking. We simply cannot out-give God. Sometimes we think we "earned" what we have, but we didn't. We are blessed by God and He gives us the opportunity to bless others. We are blessed to be a blessing.

When you and I give ourselves to God, as the Macedonians did, we are simply being grateful for all He's done for us.

Seek to be generous—with your loved ones, your church, and those in need here and elsewhere.

Generosity is about sharing with others as God has first shared with us.

Generosity is about treasure, but also about talents and time. God always blesses us from the cross of Jesus so that we can be generous in some way, to some one.

God continues to be generous, especially in His forgiveness, even when we fail to be as generous as we ought to be.

Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep our hearts and minds unto Christ Jesus.

Amen.