

Sermon – October 8, 2023

“A Cheerful Giver!” 2 Corinthians 9: 6-15

Prayer: Gracious God, as we listen and reflect on this living word, remind us again that your word is a lamp to our feet and a light to our path. Amen.

There's a story about a mother who wanted to teach her daughter a lesson about giving. She gave the little girl a quarter and a loonie for the church offering. "Put whichever one you want on the collection plate and keep the other for yourself," she told the girl. When they were coming out of church, the mother asked her daughter which amount she had given. "Well," said the little girl, "I was going to give the dollar, but just before the collection the man in the pulpit said that we should all be cheerful givers. I knew I'd be a lot more cheerful if I gave the quarter, so I did."¹

Today's letter from Paul to the Corinthian church is about an appeal similar to a stewardship campaign, specifically for what Paul calls, "the poor saints in Jerusalem." There might be a huge financial need in the Judean church and Paul was aware of their predicament. These were the followers who stayed in Jerusalem and developed the foundation of the church. Many lived in poverty after abandoning their homes and farms to follow Jesus. Paul knows that the Corinthian church is in a very healthy financial situation, many of whom were wealthy patrons of the church. Paul's opening words remind the church in Corinth that they had promised to collect money for other believers. The word "collection" was first introduced by Paul to denote the modern-day offering, but it really means collecting to help the poor and the needy. Peggy Aitchison shared that in Norway, an offering or collection is called "a sacrifice", perhaps to mean giving of your resources as a living sacrifice to God.

Paul writes, "The point is this: whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver." The word translated "cheerful" is the Greek *hilaros*, and it means joyous or celebratory. But it also has a sense of

¹ *Sermon Illustrations.com*, article on internet, <http://www.sermonillustrations.com/a-z/g/giving.htm>, accessed 14 November 2013.

readiness. It means to be ready to act at a moment's notice, to be prepared. So, when Paul tells the Corinthians about cheerful giving, he was actually encouraging them to give from the heart, whether small or big. Paul says it is how you give and being prepared for it, not how much you give that counts.

Paul's stewardship philosophy hails from his belief that God's gifts are meant not only to bless us, but for us to use to bless others. To give grudgingly or just for the sake of showing off is not truly giving. To give cheerfully is to give from the heart. While it's true that the context of Paul's letter to the Corinthians is about financial support to the Judean Christians, cheerful giving does not only entail giving monetary donations or financial support. It also includes joyfully giving of time, talents and spiritual gifts such as love, care, compassion, kindness, and presence.

So, how can one be a cheerful giver? Andy Hogue, an American lecturer and professor at Baylor University, teaches a course called "Philanthropy and the Public Good." He equated cheerful giving with generosity. Hogue writes. "Whatever our station, however much money or resources we have, we all have something to share and something to give." Hogue offers four ways individuals and families can develop a spirit of generosity and become cheerful givers:

1) *Generosity starts with gratitude.* Hogue explains, "That is the very first step, just being grateful for what we have, but also realizing that to those given much, much is expected, and to begin thinking about not possessing things but stewarding things. There are so many things that we have at our disposal to be able to enrich communities and to help other people."

2) *Generosity is more than just a transaction.* "Think of philanthropy, generosity and cheerful giving as more than writing a check. Think of it as something that can be transformative and realize that there is no such thing as an unhappy generous person. It's difficult to be unhappy when we are giving to ourselves."

3) *Generosity is a muscle you have to exercise.* "If we can't give to ourselves when we have limited means, what makes us expect that we will do it when we have more means?" Hogue said. "We all, in some way, are privileged and blessed and have resources that can be put to use for the benefit of someone else."

4) *Generosity can be creative.* There are inspired ways to give gifts in honour of a family member or friend that bring about a beautiful experience. Hogue likes to call this the

“philanthropy of collaboration.” Hogue writes: “Imagine the many things that come together in this one simple act: you, the giver, are enriched by the series of events you set into motion while the person you honor with the gift appreciates your generosity and imagination. The beneficiary of the gift then takes your offering to enrich the lives of others... You give five dollars and, with the magic of the Internet, the gift can go towards fighting disease in Africa, providing books for a teacher’s classroom or buying someone in a poor country a goat or a cow or a pig that can be a source of generating income.”

Here's a story of cheerful giving shared by Sue Morrison about her son Will when he was four or five years old. There was a Sunday school Lenten project to raise money to donate to a program to buy goats for people in need somewhere far away from BCUC. The Sunday school children were told that they had to raise the money themselves by doing chores or saving it out of their allowances, and that a goat cost about \$100 to buy. Will did extra chores willingly for weeks, his parents paid him a reasonable rate for a five-year-old’s work, and he took his earned cash in to donate to Sunday school each week. But near the end of the period for raising funds, the entire Sunday school had raised only something close to \$50 total. Will was really worried that the goal of buying a whole goat would not be achieved. He seemed to think that if the Sunday school had only \$50 to send, that the farmer in need would receive only half a goat! Knowing how hard he had worked and how concerned he was that the Sunday school should achieve this goal and send a whole goat -- not half a goat -- his parents decided to up his rate of pay considerably for the last couple of weeks of the project, so that he wouldn't be sad and disappointed. In the end, Will took in an entire \$50 so that he would be sure that a whole goat could be bought by the Sunday school.

Are you a cheerful giver of time, talents and treasures? How are you giving cheerfully and preparedly? Friends, as we celebrate Thanksgiving Day in our homes and families, let us remember Paul’s words to the Corinthians that God loves a cheerful giver. Give thanks not only in words but also in deeds. God is with us in our practice of rejoicing, thanksgiving and cheerful giving!

Let me close with a Thanksgiving Blessing by Joyce Rupp:

May an abundance of gratitude burst forth as you reflect upon what you have received.

May thanksgiving overflow in your heart, and often be proclaimed in your prayer.

May you gather around the table of your heart the ardent faithfulness, kindness, and goodness of each person who is true to you.

May the harvest of your good actions bring forth plentiful fruit each day.

May you discover a cache of hidden wisdom among the people and events that have brought you distress and sorrow.

May your basket of blessings surprise you with its rich diversity of gifts and its opportunities for growth.

May all that nourishes and resources your life bring you daily satisfaction and renewed hope.

May you slow your hurried pace of life so you can be aware of, and enjoy, what you too easily take for granted.

May you always be open, willing, and ready to share your blessings with others.

May you never forget the Generous One who loves you lavishly and unconditionally.

Amen.