

November 8 and 9, 2008, Sun Prairie UMC

“Faithful Living, Generous Giving: The Art of Being Cheerful”
Sermon by dave werner

[Note to Gentle Reader: Since I preach from notes and not a full text, what you see here is more of a summary than a sermon text. Bad news: you miss all the inspired impromptu remarks. Good news: it's a quicker “read” than “listen” I imagine. Shalom! dave]

2 Corinthians 9:6-15

9:6 The point is this: the one who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and the one who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. 9:7 Each of you must give as you have made up your mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.

9:8 And 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. 9:9 As it is written, "He scatters abroad, he gives to the poor; his righteousness endures forever." 9:10 He 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.

9:11 You will be enriched in every way for your great generosity, which will produce thanksgiving to God through us; 9:12 for the rendering of this ministry not only supplies the needs of the saints but also overflows with many thanksgivings to God. 9:13 Through 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, 9:14 while they long for you and pray for you because of the surpassing grace of God that he has given you.

9:15 Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!

As we complete this series, “Faithful Living, Generous Giving,” I remind you to complete and return your commitment card for 2009. Today I invite us all to be or become artists, practicing the art of giving cheerfully! It seems to me that this balancing act also makes a difference in how we live each and every day.

Notice that Paul does NOT want reluctant, guilt-ridden giving; Paul asks for freely chosen, gladly given gifts. For some of us, this is easier than for others.

But recall that these words from 2 Corinthians are offered around the matter of the offering Paul and his colleagues are trying to gather and deliver for the needs of the church in Jerusalem. They've been working hard for a long time!

Part of the issue is that some of the church members in Greece are wondering WHY they need to help church members in Jerusalem. And Paul has recently spoken sharply to the church in Corinth, so there's some fence-mending to do! Yet Paul wants to demonstrate from his understanding of God and God's grace and our own human nature why it is important to give generously to help others.

There are at least three reasons to give support to church and charity. One is that some of us have a spiritual gift for giving. A spiritual gift is a gift for ministry. God gives each of us at least one gift (examples include teaching, helping, giving, administration, and many more), and it is vital for the life of the congregation that each of us discerns and employs that unique gift!

The spiritual gift of giving is defined by one author as "the gift of sharing an extraordinary proportion of one's material and financial resources with great joy and eagerness to benefit others and to spread the kingdom." –p.70 in Lloyd Edwards' DISCERNING YOUR SPIRITUAL GIFTS (Cowley, 1988)

While some of us may have this gift, most of us have to develop a skill at giving generously! (It isn't a spiritual gift for us.) But all of us, as we really reflect on things, can come to the understanding that everything comes from God. All that we have and all that we are, are gifts from a gracious God! From this perspective (that "the earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof" we find our "response-ability" in intent and in practice. This "response-ability" is our second reason so give. God invites us to put our whole lives into the rich soil of God's grace and work with God in the ministry of the Kingdom.

So there are at least three reasons to choose to be cheerful in our living and in our giving.

1. Acknowledge a spiritual gift for giving
2. Respond to God's graciousness to us ("the indescribable gift" v. 15)
3. Share in the ministry of helping our neighbors, both near and far.

This is a story about a little girl named Lily and her probably purple purse (because she likes vivid colors). The Sunday School superintendent told me this about one Sunday when he took the offering:

I was collecting the offering as I do every Sunday and Lily said she had some money for the offering. She pulled a dollar out of her little purse and then another and another all the while talking about the rummage sale her family had just had at their home. I questioned the amount as I am used to getting a hand full of change or at times a dollar.

She said "Oh Yes, it's my money and my Mom said I could do what I wanted with it."

Being the father I am I snuck into the church and whispered to Lara the story of her daughter's generosity...

Visibly moved Lara said, "it is her money and if that is what she wants to do with it that is fine with her!"

I don't know if Lily has the spiritual gift of giving, but I can tell you that she was willing to give—though 1/5 at a time!—all she had to help others, as she understood it. She responded in such a way as a cheerful giver because, I suppose, she trusted her parents to provide for her.

How much do we trust God to provide for us?

It's a way of life that we can choose and practice: to trust God as we make responsible choices about earning, saving, and using God-given resources.

Cheerful givers (and those who choose cheerful lives) understand that following Jesus in the Way includes

- Offering our spiritual gifts (esp. in this instance, the gift of giving)
- Responding to God's care for us
 - In daily blessings
 - In family and friends
 - In experiencing God's presence
 - In the "big picture" of life eternal
- Involving ourselves in ministry with all God's creatures!
 - Congregational work
 - Church staff
 - Church programming
 - Church caring ministry
 - Community ministries (food bank, etc.)
 - Area ministries (homeless shelters, feeding programs, counseling programs, Habitat, etc.)
 - UMC Advance Specials

How do we experience trust in God?

- Through daily practice!
- Through discernment of what God wants us to be doing...
- Through the gift of hope that God gives us—that the future is open to the working out of God's intention for creation, including us!

“If I keep a green bough in my heart, the singing bird will come.” --Chinese proverb

If I keep that green bough—that growing edge, that decision to thrive, that openness to God—in my life, then the song of God’s grace will fill my life! If we keep hope as our companion, then we will be able to perceive God’s activity in our life together.

“Faithful living, Generous giving.”

It’s a plan;

 It’s a possibility;

 It’s a reality;

 It’s an opportunity;

It’s response-ability: our gift to God and to one another.