

Sermon, June 28, 2015 - Pentecost 5

## God's Generosity Feeds Ours

2 Corinthians 8:1–9, 13–15



Introduction:

Dear friends in Christ

If we would be tested today on our generosity what would you say would our mark be?

We do appreciate people who are generous but sometimes we find it tough to be generous with the resources we control.

There are some possible reasons why is that we are not so generous at times. One of the biggest reasons is that unemployment for we do not have the income and the resources to continue being generous. Not having employment makes it hard to be generous not even contribute as necessary. Having a fixed income today even makes us fearful of not been able to survive, not even have enough left to meet our bills and obligations. If we would fail our generosity test, we do have the justification and our reasons.

Yet today we hear the apostle Paul talk in our text about some poor Christians who “begging ... for the favour” of being generous! Now, can we be like them? Can we imitate them in their generosity?

There are for sure three reasons that prevent us from being generous. Even so, we shall see how Jesus shows God's generosity . . . and how God can power our generosity even in tough times, how God's generosity feeds ours.

But first, what's being generous anyways? Being generous is: “showing a readiness to give more of something, as money or time, than is strictly necessary or expected.... Showing kindness toward others. Being “characterized by a noble or kindly spirit... Liberal in giving... marked by abundance or ample proportions. And Paul says it is a mark of grace and an act of grace itself. Our invitation this morning then, is to take part in this grace as well.

And consider those times when we stop being generous. Here are three reasons that usually stop us from being generous.

First, we may be afraid to give too much while we need that money for our own self. Now, it is 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.” As you see we do make it our priority that our basic needs in the present and the future be cared for. We are raised to think that we should be financially independent. We assume that each of us, under normal circumstances, will earn enough money to take care of ourselves and our families, but nothing else, especially when we are watching every penny in a hard economy, 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.

Second, we may think we can't give enough to make a difference. Let's face it, the needs around us are so great and what we give and share might seem so small. We're not just talking about money. We're talking about giving our time or using our talents and abilities.

You know how it goes, we do get, here at church and at home, lots of 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, especially when organizations that direct our contributions charge so much in overhead expenses. What's the use, we say,

Third, we may feel our generosity could be abused. I heard one occasion that one person's contribution was actually refused. That makes it tough to be generous again in that situation, for sure. Others might think 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.

Now, upon hearing those reasons, we might think, yes, that's right! Those are good reasons for not to be generous, or stopping being one. Sometimes we let these reasons grow into excuses for not being generous at all. That might be so, but we also need to recognize that one of devil's best tricks is to use half-truths to lead us to sin. And that often happens with money or other blessings with which to be generous. But when you or I are not generous because of our selfishness, we sin.

But just as Paul pushes us today to consider our generosity he also provides help for growing in a generous spirit. He points us to this fact:

That Jesus shows God's generosity to us. He says in v 9 of our text: "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. Jesus himself said: "Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head." (Mat. 8:20)

But then later on, in the next chapter Jesus is questioned as to why he was forgiving someone's sins, He said: "But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins"—he then said to the paralytic—"Rise, pick up your bed and go home." (Mat. 9:6)

So, what the apostle Paul is describing as Jesus riches, is not material possession but what he is talking about is Jesus 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, when he says: "but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us." We are each blessed by God's generosity in giving Jesus to die in our place, though we don't deserve it. That's why John 3:16 says God loved the world so much that he gave up Jesus.

Then this generous God helps us be generous.

Actually upon the forgiveness of our sins, and by the power of the Holy Spirit working in us we can be generous. We can give out of caring. 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 towards those in need. And that's what happened with the people, the Christian in Macedonia, who weren't by any-means rich yet they wanted to be generous, in fact begged Paul to allow them to be generous. 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). Without giving ourselves to the Lord it is difficult to be generous, isn't it!

The English word "generous" comes from a French word meaning "of noble birth." Now, in Christ we have been made of noble birth. Another writer, the apostle Peter said: "But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light." (1 Peter 2:9)

Our generosity comes because we are of noble spiritual birth. We are children of the King, sisters and brothers of the Prince of Peace. So . . . We give out of what we have.

Generosity isn't about amount, but attitude. It is like what the apostle Paul reminds us in verse 12: "For if the readiness is there, it is acceptable according to what a person has, not according to what he does not have."

As you see, 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. We give out of what we have. Generosity dear friends, is a gift from the heart.

We can give to thank God. That's what the Macedonian Christians did. Paul writes in verses 2 and 3: "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. <sup>3</sup> For they gave according to their means, as I can testify, and beyond their means, of their own accord."

You could put a check for a million dollars in the offering plate at this service, and if you are a billionaire, that might not be generous. It might be leftovers. You also might give 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. And the saying is true: we cannot out-give God. Sometimes we think we "earned" what we have, but we didn't. We are blessed by God to bless others. After all we are Children of God, a royal nation, holy people.

The story is told that one day a beggar by the roadside asked for alms from Alexander the Great as he passed by. The man was poor and wretched and had no claim upon the ruler, no right even to lift a solicitous hand. Yet the Emperor threw him several gold coins. A courtier was astonished at his generosity and commented, "Sir, copper coins would adequately meet a beggar's need. Why give him gold?" Alexander responded in royal fashion, "Copper coins would suit the beggar's need, but gold coins suit Alexander's giving." (Author unknown)

And our giving is grounded in Christ who is the living demonstration of God's steadfast love that never ends, his mercies that never come to an end. "they are new every morning" great is His faithfulness!

When you and I give ourselves to God, as the Macedonians did, we are grateful for all he's done for us. We ask forgiveness for those times we're selfish instead of generous. Then we seek to be generous—with our loved ones, our church, 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.

So . . . this week . . . look for a way to give of yourself that doesn't involve money, or maybe so. But be generous with your brothers and sister in the congregation, or in the community, or abroad, be a blessing to them, so that in turn others can be blessed as well, your generosity doesn't stop with the one who receives but when the receiver becomes generous as well, your blessing will reach to others... just remember that it is God's generosity that feeds your generosity, all for Jesus' sake.

In His name, amen.