

October 11, 2020 – St. Andrew's (Sarnia)

2 Corinthians 9:6-15

⁶ Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. ⁷ Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. ⁸ And God is able to bless you abundantly, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work. ⁹ As it is written:

“They have freely scattered their gifts to the poor;
their righteousness endures forever.”

¹⁰ Now he who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will also supply and increase your store of seed and will enlarge the harvest of your righteousness.

¹¹ You will be enriched in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God.

¹² This service that you perform is not only supplying the needs of the Lord's people but is also overflowing in many expressions of thanks to God. ¹³ Because of the service by which you have proved yourselves, others will praise God for the obedience that accompanies your confession of the gospel of Christ, and for your generosity in sharing with them and with everyone else. ¹⁴ And in their prayers for you their hearts will go out to you, because of the surpassing grace God has given you. ¹⁵ Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!

Message: Generosity

In honour of this being Thanksgiving weekend and harvest Sunday,
I thought we'd spend our time together reflecting on generosity.
And it's not because you are not generous...
...it's because you are,
with your time and energy,
and with your tithes and offerings, too.
That pile of groceries and goods at the front of the church last Sunday
all on its own
was a visual demonstration for us all
that generosity is a big part of St. Andrew's church.
So today, we are going to celebrate that generosity
as something fundamental to our life as Christians
and reflect on the impact
that generosity has on us
and on others.

Our Scripture reading this morning sounds like
a very general discussion about generosity and thanksgiving.
But it is, in reality, the flowery bit of a very practical request

for a monetary donation.

Money is always an awkward subject, in any situation, but especially in church.

We usually use euphemisms, nicer words, to refer to it;

words like gift or tithe or offering

or stewardship or legacy.

All good words,

and all rich with meanings

that remind us of the proper attitude

to have when it comes to money.

But still, we tend to avoid being too explicit about money,

particularly during worship,

because it can be a sensitive, uncomfortable subject.

I've choked the word out a few times,

but I admit that I struggle.

Other times and situations

– board of managers, committee meetings,

our once a year congregational meeting –

those are the places to talk money.

Not worship; not when we're gathered together

to hear God's Word and pray and praise,

and to celebrate and nurture our faith in Jesus.

And yet, we know that the letters the apostle Paul wrote to his church-plants

were intended to be read aloud to the whole congregation.

In one of the earliest examples we have of Paul's letters

– to the Thessalonian church –

he comes right out and says,

"I charge you to read this letter

to all the brothers and sisters."

But, though Paul tackles some heavy, contentious issues in his letters,

even he seems to have needed some time

to work himself up to talking about money

in this second letter to the church in Corinth.

Up until chapter 8 of his letter,

Paul had talked about putting God first,

developing a sense of community

and living out your faith.

He had talked about forgiveness,

about experiencing something new

and about being an ambassador for Christ.

Paul had asked that the Corinthians let go of their human expectations,
 feel suffering for a greater cause
 and open their hearts so that God could renew them.
 And then he asked them for money.

What does Paul want them to donate money to?
 To sister churches in need, in Jerusalem,
 who were struggling to meet the needs of their poorer members.

At the great Jerusalem council
 that Jesus' disciples held and that Paul attended,
 one of the outcomes was that Paul
 and the churches he'd planted
 would financially support the Jerusalem Christians
 and their ministry.

So Paul asked the Corinthians to give money,
 telling them that the church in Macedonia
 – a much poorer community than Corinth –
 had already given money
 and proclaiming that if they sowed sparingly
 they would reap sparingly,
 but if they sowed bountifully
 they would reap a bountiful harvest.

Paul did not beat around the bush, did he?
 But as much as this letter might sound like
 a guilt-trip or a dig at Corinth's pride...
 ...the way Paul talks about generosity
 makes it clear
 that for him,
 our faith and our giving
 are woven together.

Paul associates particular words with generosity,
 words like: abundant, abound,
 freely, increase,
 enlarge and enrich,
 sharing, overflowing and surpassing.
 He talks about generosity in the same breath
 as thanksgiving, as praise,

and as the Gospel of Jesus.

These are words we use to describe
 God's blessings and forgiveness and grace.
 Paul has made generosity – giving – part of that vocabulary,
 part of that same conversation
 about what it means
 to be Christian.

So giving is not something that we do because we are Christians
 and our churches, charities and missions
 need money and material goods in order to run;
 giving is something that we do because we are Christians
 and God calls us to give, as He does,
 right alongside everything else He calls us to do.

I think many of us – without giving it much thought –
 give generously, because God calls us to, of whatever we have
 – money, groceries, time, skills –
 and leave it at that.
 We know why we give as Christians;
 but what impact does our giving have,
 on ourselves and on others,
 beyond the practical things?

Thanksgiving and generosity exist in our hearts and lives
 as a sort of unending cycle,
 where one inspires the other.
 We give thanks because God is generous,
 and we are generous ourselves with others
 as part of that grateful response to God.
 Giving and thanksgiving are just as integral to our faith
 as prayer, as service, as community,
 as worship and as learning.
 Giving and thanksgiving should be talked about
 in conjunction with the other parts of our faith
 because it feeds and strengthens our faith.

Getting caught up in that cycle of giving and thanksgiving
 in dialogue with God,
 overflowing into the lives of those around us...
 ...it expands our faith

and allows us to explore
 who we are as Christians
 on a deeper level.
 God's promise to his people, to us
 – from the very beginning, starting with Abraham –
 has been that he will bless us and others through us,
 that the resources he entrusts to us,
 the relationship we have with him,
 all of it, all of us,
 God will use as an instrument
 for sharing his grace with others.
 God is generous with us,
 and we are grateful for everything he's done and will do for us.
 We give thanks to God because he's generous,
 and we give to others
 because that's how God has treated us.

And then something really special can happen,
 something Paul mentions in his letter.
 "You will be enriched in every way
 so that you can be generous on every occasion,"
 wrote Paul,
 "and your generosity will result
 in thanksgiving to God."

How amazing would that be, if St. Andrew's generosity as Christians
 not only supported our church and the mission and programs of the PCC,
 not only supplied the practical needs of others
 through food drives and mitten trees and dinners,
 but also inspired other people to reach out to God,
 even if only for a moment,
 even if it's just that small beginning
 of a single prayer to thank him.
 Because people know who we are,
 know that we're followers of Jesus,
 know that we really do try and live
 in this new, Christ-imitating way
 and that's why we give,
 they just might give thanks to God, too.

Our generosity, our giving,
 makes visible the invisible working of God's grace in us;

makes it visible to one another,
which is very encouraging;
and makes it visible to our community
and even to people around the world.

It's hard to believe in things you can't touch or see,
and there is such skepticism these days
about the vitality of churches
and the need for churches and for faith in God.
Our churches – the physical buildings –
are big, un-ignorable visible reminders
of God and the presence of God's people in a community.

But how we live out our faith in our everyday lives,
including our generosity,
gives an idea of what our churches mean
and helps others trust in our claims about God
and the effect he's had on us.
The way we live our faith tells people about God
and why faith matters
by making visible God's transforming,
healing, uplifting grace
at work in us.
And it makes it real
– see-able and touchable –
to a world
that has great need of grace.

The more we give, the more we get back.
The more we give, the more God's blessings are unleashed in the world,
inspiring thankfulness and the small beginnings of faith in others.
The more we give,
the more we are letting go of the human world
that we are living in.
The more we give,
the more we are giving others
a glimpse
of the kingdom of God,
the world as it could be,
the world as it will be.

You will be enriched in every way
so that you can be generous on every occasion,

and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God.
This service that you perform is not only supplying
the needs of the Lord's people
but is also overflowing
in many expressions of thanks to God.
We give, not out of obligation,
but cheerfully,
and out of joy, out of love,
out of happiness...
...and out of great anticipation
of the blessings and new abundant life
God has in store for us
and for all creation.
Thanks be to God
for his generosity and grace.
Amen.