

## **Thanksgiving 2020 - 2 Corinthians 9**

Wayne Mouland forwarded to me this week something called “The Farmer’s Grace”. It will be familiar to some of you.

It is about a story of a visiting pastor who attended a men's breakfast in the middle of a rural farming area of the country.

The group had asked an older farmer, decked out in bib overalls, to say grace for the morning breakfast :

"Lord, I hate buttermilk," the farmer began. The visiting pastor opened one eye to glance at the farmer and wonder where this was going.

The farmer loudly proclaimed, "Lord, I hate lard." Now the pastor was growing concerned. Without missing a beat, the farmer continued, "And Lord, you know I don't much care for raw white flour."

The pastor once again opened an eye to glance around the room and saw that he wasn't the only one to feel uncomfortable.

Then the farmer added, "But Lord, when you mix them all together and bake them, I do love warm fresh biscuits.

Paul is writing to the Corinthian church in today's epistle reading and some scholars believe that this passage is from a smaller letter that has been assumed into what we know of as 2nd Corinthians. Paul is taking up a collection for the church in Jerusalem that is suffering because of a famine. This famine, which spread to various parts of the middle east in the middle of the first century, was reported in the area of Judea in the years 46 & 47 CE.

We can tell from this passage and other's that the response of the Corinthian church came with some grumbling and perhaps some penny pinching. The church in Jerusalem was predominantly Jewish and the church in Corinth Gentile, which may have cultivated some less than generous feelings.

This is a great passage for Thanksgiving weekend because it turns our usual focus of how we are to give thanks for all our good gifts completely around. This passage is all about our practice of giving and in particular the attitude we should have when we do give.

God loves a cheerful giver, writes Paul.

I have to be perfectly honest - I do not react well to the verse, "God loves a cheerful giver". For some reason it takes me back to being a child, being in a particularly grumpy or put out mood, probably crying for no good reason and being told to "stop it and put a smile on your face".

Nothing makes one less cheerful than being told one should be cheerful.

Paul, much like Jesus, uses metaphors from farming that would be very familiar to this agriculture dependent community. If you want to have a good crop, you have to sow many seeds, knowing that some will not come to fruition for whatever reason - bad seed, inhospitable environment, too much wind, not enough rain.

Very bluntly, if you want your gift to have meaning and impact for the recipient, then give more than you think is the basic need.

On top of that, be happy about it!

This of course is the challenge, but let me invite you into it in the way that I believe it is meant to be heard. This is not about putting on a happy face when you don't feel it. The world is full of far too many of people who smile when turned one way, only to frown and complain when turned another.

This is about realizing and living into the truth of Christ's message of living lives in which we practice the reckless abandon of giving in love, faith and hope. We don't give in such a way to be, at the end of the day, impoverished and exhausted. Rather we give in such ways because we believe what Jesus and now Paul are saying to be true. When we sow generously with the seed we have stewardship over, we find life growing, sprouting and thriving all around us, and then our lives are enriched, nourished and sustained. It is one of the fundamental "feedback" loops of being human. And when we enter this feedback loop with hearts open with loving sincerity, we find ourselves blessed by joy. Our "cheerful" giving comes naturally out of the abundance of life we experience - for ourselves and for others.

Participating in the economy of generosity is what we are created for as human beings. We have forgotten that we are merely stewards of the resources we call our own, for a time - whether that be land, money or the skills we have. How we steward these resources has a direct impact on lives we live, on our communities and families. The gospel of individualism has failed us terribly. Though we may hesitate to embrace a gospel of radical generosity (any financial advisor worth their salt would likely advise you against such abandon), what we are failing to understand is that we are hesitating to embrace a richer, fuller, more satisfying life.

I know that many of you in this parish understand what I am speaking about because I have seen your generous giving and the blessing you have received from those offerings.

This is not a sermon to suggest you need to give more. Please do not hear that. The message to us today is simply this - God invites us to pick up what we have, as much as we can hold, and throw it out into this needy world with the abandon of faith and hope and trust. Not foolishly - the farmer doesn't sow seed on a rocky path, nor should we. We use the

wisdom and discernment God's spirit gives us. And then we step back and watch the Creator of the Universe nourish and care for those seeds, with our willing hands and labour. The next thing you know, life is sprouting up all around us, now nourishing us in return. The cycle continues.

This is a feedback loop you want to get stuck in.

The farmer who hated buttermilk and raw flour, but loved biscuits has something to teach us. When we donate to a charity, volunteer at a nursing home, provide food for the foodbank, many of us have no way of seeing or knowing, not only how that impacts people in need, but also the functioning of the whole community. It won't matter, we might think, that I don't give to this or that (if I can). But it does. At the end of the day many seeds are needed to grow a robust crop, and all the ingredients are needed to make biscuits.

Let me conclude with Eugene Peterson's paraphrase of this passage from 2 Corinthians - he has such a way with words after all...

## 2 Corinthians 8 - 15, The Message:

God can pour on the blessings in astonishing ways so that you're ready for anything and everything, more than just ready to do what needs to be done. As one psalmist puts it,

He throws caution to the winds,  
giving to the needy in reckless abandon.

His right-living, right-giving ways  
never run out, never wear out.

This most generous God who gives seed to the farmer that becomes bread for your meals is more than extravagant with you. He gives you something you can then give away, which grows into full-formed lives, robust in God, wealthy in every way, so that you can be generous in every way, producing with us great praise to God.

Carrying out this social relief work involves far more than helping meet the bare needs of poor Christians. It also produces abundant and bountiful thanksgivings to God. This relief offering is a prod to live at your very best,

showing your gratitude to God by being openly obedient to the plain meaning of the Message of Christ. You show your gratitude through your generous offerings to your needy brothers and sisters, and really toward everyone. Meanwhile, moved by the extravagance of God in your lives, they'll respond by praying for you in passionate intercession for whatever you need. Thank God for this gift, his gift. No language can praise it enough!

Happy Thanksgiving, really!