

St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church

"Generosity Part 2"

Scripture: 2 Corinthians 9:6-15

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Baptism of Jawa Monono

Songs/Hymns: Praise to the Lord, the Almighty 321, I'm gonna live so 648, Jesus loves me 373 (split around baptism 1,2 then 3), Lord of all power 626

Do you wonder about those acts of 'generosity'
That find their way into the newspapers?

How some gifts seem to be rather self-interested...
How some charity seems to be focused on the rich
Instead of the poor.

One article in the *The Atlantic* noted that "
Of the 50 largest individual gifts to public charities in 2012,
34 went to educational institutions,
the vast majority of them colleges and universities,
like Harvard, Columbia, and Berkeley,
that cater to [America] and the world's elite.

Museums and arts organizations such as the Metropolitan Museum of Art
received nine of these major gifts,
with the remaining donations spread among medical facilities
and fashionable charities like the Central Park
Conservancy.

Not a single one of them [it went on to say]
went to a social-service organization
or to a charity that principally serves the poor
and the dispossessed."ⁱ

But today's generosity isn't just about maintaining class privileges
But also creating a personal legacy.

Back in 2015 "Joan Weill, the wife of Citigroup billionaire Sandy Weill,
announced [she] would donate \$20 million
to a small, cash-strapped school called Paul Smith's College
in New York's Adirondack Mountains
with one big string attached:

She insisted that the school would have to be renamed in her honor,
to be known forever as Joan Weill-Paul Smith's College."ⁱⁱ

While presented as fait accompli by administration,
the school's alumni rebelled.
When opposition grew,
the proposed name change was abandoned.

And that gift,
That gift was withdrawn.

In the world around us generosity is often self-oriented
and supports vested interests.

But is this the way that generosity is to be practiced in the church?

PAUSE

Last Sunday we explored the topic of generosity.
The context was a fundraising drive Paul was leading
For poor Christians in Jerusalem.

Paul took some time explaining generosity's origins.
He argued that generosity is a 'grace',
a gift of God working in us and through us.

Paul continues to talk about generosity the passage we read today.
But now his focus turns from generosity's origins
to its shape and character.
Paul tells us what Christian generosity looks like.

What Paul describes is very different from what we observe
In the world around.

While we have read a number of verses from Second Corinthians,
Today I'm going to explore just one of them,
Verse 12.

Speaking of generosity, in verse 12 Paul says:
"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."

Paul describes generosity as 'service'.
The Greek uses the word 'leitourgia'
which is the basis for that English word 'liturgy'.

As one scholar describes this word:
"In the secular sphere it denoted the service
which the wealthy might make
to supply the needs of the community.

In the Septuagint [the Greek version of the Old Testament]
it was used of the service of the priests in the temple.”ⁱⁱⁱ

All to say that Paul would understand our giving
As a way we worship God.

Paul also talks about generosity as “supplying needs”.
His fundraising drive was for the poor Christians in Jerusalem
Rather than building a new cathedral.

While I don’t think we should deny the arts,
Especially when you consider the fine craftsmanship
That was devoted to the Tabernacle and the Temple,
It seems that Christian generosity
Is focused on basic needs.

This makes sense.

A person can’t enjoy community theatre
When they are hungry,
When their cupboards are bare.

Paul talks about Christian generosity as supplying needs
And then continues to talk about generosity
“overflowing in many expressions of thanks to God.”

In the broader context of today’s lesson
Christian giving is a response to God’s goodness.
We give cheerfully
because the Lord has so generously provided for us.

Those who receive the gift all respond with gratitude,
Both because it is meeting a real need in their lives
And they know that it is an expression
of genuine love and concern.

You may have noticed that for Paul,
Christian generosity has a dual focus.
It is focused on God and it is focused on the needs of others.

This is not surprising.

“For Paul the two great commandments
of love to God and neighbor are inseparable,
so he moves naturally
from talking of our response to the needs of others
to speech about the glory of God.”^{iv}

In Paul’s letter to the church at Corinth
Paul describes the shape and character of Christian generosity.

Christian generosity is an act of worship
that meets real human needs and brings God glory.

Does this mean we shouldn’t support a local school or sports team?
Does this mean we need to rub out those names
Engraved on those memorial gifts scattered around the church?

I don’t think Paul wants to limit our generosity,
As much as to give it a clearer focus.

Cultural events deserve support
And letting you name go public,
can inspire the generosity of others.

But God has richly blessed us
Not to maintain the comforts of our class,
Or making our family name prominent.

We are to respond to the cries of need around us.
Our lives are for the glory of God.

PAUSE

To my father's consternation
My mom was a very generous person
Who supported numerous people and projects
Outside of our family.

If she was still alive
and I could ask her about the greatest gift she'd ever given,
She'd probably talk about that trip she made to Guatamala,
To build some homes
inan impoverished Christian community.

My mom was grateful to God for the blessings she had received in life,
And providing others with shelter
was a tangible way to express this gratitude.

But being there among the people
enabled her to experience the gratitude of the recipients
And see how this gift produced even more thanksgiving to God.

May we all discover ways
To glorify God even as we help others.
Amen and amen.

ⁱ Ken Stern “Why the Rich Don’t Give to Charity” April 2013 *The Atlantic*
<https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2013/04/why-the-rich-dont-give/309254/>

ⁱⁱ “Give A Donation, Ask For Naming Rights” November 3, 2015 <https://www.npr.org/2015/11/03/454036482/give-a-donation-ask-for-naming-rights>

ⁱⁱⁱ Best, Ernest. *Second Corinthians: Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (pp. 86-87). Presbyterian Publishing Corporation. Kindle Edition.

^{iv} Best, Ernest. *Second Corinthians: Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (p. 86). Presbyterian Publishing Corporation. Kindle Edition.