

The Twenty-First Sunday of Pentecost

October 9, 2016

Prayer of the Day: O merciful Creator, your hand is open wide to satisfy the needs of every living creature. Make us always thankful for your loving providence; and grant that we, remembering the richness of your grace, may be faithful stewards of all your good gifts; through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

Verse of the Day: Alleluia! This is the Lord, we trusted in him; let us rejoice and be glad in his salvation. Alleluia! (Isaiah 25:9)

Sermon Text: 2 Corinthians 9:6-15

What do you think of first when you think of God's generosity? Do you think of His physical gifts to you? Do you think of the His providence in creating a rich world which provides for so many things for everyone? Each year there is seedtime and harvest, and all kinds of good things. He promises to provide what we need for our bodies each day. Do you think of His wisdom in creating you? Each of us is an individual. We have different talents and skills. And He loves each of us, and uses those different gifts to benefit us and our families and friends and His Gospel.

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 man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. ⁸ And God is able to make all grace abound to you, 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:

“He has scattered abroad his gifts to the poor;
his 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 made rich 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 God's people but is also overflowing in many expressions of thanks to God. ¹³ Because of the service by which you have proved yourselves, men 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!

Do you think of His spiritual gifts to you? Do you think of your Baptism—that day on which God used His Word and water to forgive your sins and give you faith and make you His own. He has committed Himself to you, and said that He will be your God and you will be His forever. Do you think of the Lord's Supper—that our Savior comes to you with His real body and blood and says, “Take, eat and drink, this is given for the forgiveness of

your sins. Now go in peace.” Do you think of the daily blessing of being able to hear or read your Savior’s Word in the Bible, or hear it here in church (and school)?

Our God is a wonderfully generous God, and gives all these things CHEERFULLY. He does not give things grudgingly—He gives them with great joy. This morning, we look at one portion of our Christian lives, that of making gifts to this generous Giver. As we look at our own giving, we see that each of us as a **CHEERFUL GIVER REFLECTS THE CHEERFUL GIVE HIMSELF**. We will look at this in three ways:

1. Cheerful giving is motivated by God’s grace alone.
2. Cheerful giving is blessed by God’s grace.
3. Cheerful giving says “thanks” for God’s grace.

There is a section in the Book of Titus which is a beautiful description of just who we are. This is part of a reading that is often used for Christmas. Titus says that Jesus “**...gave Himself to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for Himself a people that are His very own, EAGER TO DO WHAT IS GOOD.**” Your God wants you to grow in His grace. Peter put it this way:

³His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. ⁴Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires. ⁵For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; ⁶and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; ⁷and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, love. ⁸For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁹But if anyone does not have them, he is nearsighted and blind, and has forgotten that he has been cleansed from his past sins. (2 Peter 1:3-9).

As we said, we are looking at our Christian Giving. Our Lord has a lot to say about how we manage His gifts of money and property that He loans us while we are on this earth. Did you know that the Bible has more than five hundred references to prayer. That’s probably not a surprise. But did you know it has more than 2,000 references to the Christian’s God-pleasing use of money and property. We use money every day. It’s a really important blessing God gives us, because it turns into so many of His other blessings: food, shelter, education, medical care, and so many other things. As one person once said, “Christians should only talk about money on days they use it.”

It can be hard to talk about the use of money and property in the church, though, for a number of reasons:

- Jesus said, “You can’t serve both God and Money.” So there is a natural tension there between them. We can see money. But we can’t see God, and have to live by His promises.

- My sinful nature is thoroughly greedy and selfish and self-absorbed, and yours is not any different. Our sinful natures want lots of money now, and aren't at all interested in depending on God, or putting up with the limits on what He gives us, even though He is truly generous and does give us exactly what we need to serve Him in our lives here on this earth. Our sinful natures will not repent, and will remain this way this side of heaven. So there is a natural tension between your sinful nature and your Christian nature, which does love and trust God.
- There is tension in church when we use money. We have different opinions about just how it should be used. We may put together a plan for ministry (budget), but may or may not reach that goal. Sometimes, gifts may exceed what we have chosen to do. Other times, they may not.
- The world around us tells us that to use money for Savior's Gospel is a really silly thing to do. You may have even had a family member tell you at some point that your offerings are too much, or you're doing something dumb when you are supporting our Savior's work. The world will consistently tell you that there are much more interesting or useful things for you to use your money for.
- Last, there is the devil, who absolutely despises each and every gift of any size that you bring to your Savior. The devil knows that your gifts are good Christian works that mean a lot. Your gifts are evidence of your faith in and love of Jesus. They honor Him. They spread the Word of God, since it does take money to do that. But the devil is against you every step of the way on every bit of your giving.

When we look at these different angles to money, we also see that there are times we have sinned in how we have handled money. Maybe by greed or selfishness. Maybe by cheapness with God. When you give gifts to Him, if you do it grudgingly or resentfully, it's not a good Christian work, it's a sin. Oh, sure, you wrote the check, and the church got a gift, but it certainly wasn't a Christian good work, and didn't do you any good.

Our Savior has forgiven these sins and all of our sins when it comes to our natural greed, selfishness and unwillingness to truly make cheerful Christian gifts. He gives us pure hearts which love Him and are ready to go and generous when it comes to making gifts.

Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. Here is an illustration of a farmer—needs to sow correctly, and to trust that his work will work out. He doesn't know how the growing season will end. If he chooses to shortcut with the seed he plants, and just plants a little, he won't get much of a crop. It's the same with our Christian lives. If we don't listen to God's Word and learn it, we won't get much from it. If we don't work at using it to make our faith grow, we won't get much growth in our faith. If we don't work at living by that Word, we won't get much done as Christians. This is what Peter was talking about earlier in the verses we read.

Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. It's the same with our gifts to our Savior. But let's get a couple things straight first.

- Your God is not a beggar. He doesn't need your gifts. But He gives you the privilege of giving them, and He loves them.
- If you have no interest in giving, then something is wrong, since the Christian nature is by nature thankful and generous.

Your God does not manipulate you to make gifts. He does not say something like, "If you give this, you'll be a bronze giver. If you give this, you'll be a silver giver. If you give this, you'll be a gold, or platinum giver." We do not do fund-raising in the church. We encourage Christians to make gifts solely because Jesus has forgiven our sins and promises us the spectacular inheritance of heaven.

Look again at Paul's words, "Not reluctantly, or under compulsion." Do not give because you feel you must do your fair share. Do not give because someone else isn't. Do not give because the budget is behind and you feel pressure. Do not give because you are bargaining with God, since you can't. Did you know that there are some churches where when you join you have to give them a tax return, and they will tell you how much your gift is going to be each year. That is atrocious. God doesn't say anything like that.

Look at what He does say: "God loves a cheerful giver." The Greek word here is literally what we would translate as "hilarious." It means cheerful, willing, prompt. I know you know what hilarious means, because I can see some of you smirking. Hilarious is fun. If you're in the middle of something hilarious, you probably don't want it to end. Your gifts to your Savior are not obligations, they are hilarious--they are gifts of joy. In your checkbook, you can see the obligations—mortgage, car, utilities, education, medical expenses and all kinds of other things. Your gifts are different. Give them with a joyful, generous heart which is the same as Christ's heart. He generously gave HIMSELF on the cross for your sins, and rose from the dead so that you know for certain that your sins are forgiven. Your gifts are results of God's grace to you.

I can't tell you just what your gift will be. Your pastor can't tell you just what your gift will be. It's between you and your Savior. There is a beautiful verse that pastor just read from the end of the epistle reading earlier: **"For if the willingness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has, not according to what one does not have."** (2 Cor. 8:12) Your God knows what He has blessed you with. And He knows the heart that you make the gift with. That's why gifts that please God are not determined by the number on the check, but by the heart that gives them. It is why a child can give a gift that may look small, but pleases God very much. It's why Jesus praised the widow who literally gave her last two cents so highly. He saw her heart. Cheerful Giving is motivated by God's grace alone.

Cheerful Giving is also blessed by God's grace. Look at what Paul says, **And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work. As it is written:**

**"He has scattered abroad his gifts to the poor;
his righteousness endures forever."**

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. You will be made rich in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God. Note the ALLS. God guarantees blessings. Not that you bought them, but that He is so generous.

Now note that God does not say something like “If you give a lot, you’ll get a lot back.” The Bible never says that there will be a direct correlation financially with what you give. It says something better here: You will have all you need so that you can abound in every good work. Think of what we pray for in the Lord’s prayer. In the seven petitions, only one deals with money and stuff, “Give us this day our daily bread.” The others deal with spiritual things, that God’s Word be taught and the devil’s work broken. That our sins be forgiven, and we forgive others. That we avoid temptation and be delivered from evil. Those are eternal blessings, and have no price tag. Your Savior promises to richly bless you in every way.

You came into this world with no possessions, and you will also leave everything behind someday.

Let’s suppose in this life, you have lost everything, like Job. What’s really changed? While your physical circumstances change, and may be better or worse at times, your Savior, Who says you’re safe in the palm of His hand, does not. Cheerful giving is blessed by God’s grace.

This service that you perform is not only supplying the needs of God’s people but is also overflowing in many expressions of thanks to God. Because of the service by which you have proved yourselves, men 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. And in their prayers for you their hearts will go out to you, because of the surpassing grace God has given you. Your gifts are a mark of your own faith, and demonstrate your own thanks to God. But why are you here in this service? The easy answer is that you drove here. But it is far deeper than that. You came because you wanted to hear your Savior’s Gospel again. But it’s even deeper than that. You came here because our Lord saw to it that the Gospel would be preached and the Sacraments would be used in this place. And it has been that way for more than ____ years now. Why did that happen? God led people some time ago to want that for this place, and they did it. They loved our Savior enough to get church (and school) here. They loved you enough to do that, even though they may have never known you, and won’t, this side of heaven.

One of the great things about Christian’s offerings is they do so much good. And we actually get to see that good. We see it here in this congregation. We see it in other WELS congregations. We see it in mission work. We see it in training pastors, teachers and staff ministers. We see it in gifts for other kinds of ministries in our Synod, like LWMS or Kingdom Workers or Humanitarian Aid. We walk together in our Wisconsin Synod, and we continue to share with our Savior in the teamwork of preaching and teaching and sharing His Gospel. Others loved you, and saw to it that the Gospel came here. Now you love others, some of whom you know, but many whom you won’t know this side of

heaven. But you love them and you make gifts for their good. And they praise God for this grace God has given you, even though they will not know you this side of heaven. Cheerful giving is blessed by God's grace.

Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift! ALL CREDIT GOES TO GOD. Cheerful Giving says "thanks" for God's grace.

Christians are literally "Little Christs," as someone once said. We reflect the grace our Savior has given us. We reflect His love as we love Him and love those around us. Our gifts are gifts of thankfulness because we have only received from God. We have not earned nor deserved all His kindness. And so, as we close, we see that giving is a delight--

- Giving is a delight when we realize that we are giving to God Himself.
- Giving is a delight when we view it as the worship that it truly is.
- Giving is a delight when we realize the privilege of giving. We get to share in Christ's saving people.
- Giving is a delight when we realize we are acting like Jesus. (2 Cor. 8:9)
- Giving is a delight when we realize God does not want our money unless we truly want to give it.
- Giving is a delight when we realize God rewards it as yet another example of His generosity. (v 8)

As you bring your gifts, may it always be with great and hilarious joy. Motivated by God's grace alone. Understanding that it will be blessed by God's grace. And always saying "thanks" for God's grace. Amen.