

Sunday May 29, 2022
Lesson 13: Acts of Generosity
Scripture: 2 Corinthians 9

Context:

Our closing lesson for this unit is on how disciples of Jesus are called to be generous. One of the marks of following Jesus is learning to give back to God with joy and thanksgiving. As we close this unit, we are reminded on how all things we have in this life are gifts from God and thus we should find it a privilege to be able to say thank you back as a form of our witness.

The scripture lesson today comes the book of 2 Corinthians found in the New Testament. The first part of the book of 2 Corinthians focuses on the past of Paul's dealings with the Corinthians and the joy Paul feels in serving alongside them. All of this acts as the primer for the issues Paul wants to dive into in the latter part of the letter.

Messengers have been sent to Corinth for a purpose. In the preceding chapter Paul discusses how he had praised the Corinthians to the Macedonians. Sadly, his praise has not matched the behavior of the Corinthians. The Macedonians had outstripped the Corinthians in their giving (8:1-5) and if Paul had individuals from Macedonia with him on his next visit to Corinth, both Paul and Corinthian church would be humiliated.¹ To ensure this would not happen, Paul sends messengers ahead of him to make sure the Corinthians realize the importance of giving. The word Paul uses for the monetary giving is "gift" which is a bit unusual and yet fits with how the church will use the term in the future.² To give a gift of money also points to how this belongs not just from the people, but from God who has given us all things.

Throughout the chapter, Paul emphasizes the importance of generosity and how it ties to their walk with God. Those who give will always be blessed, even if there is no material return in what they give. Paul particularly focuses on a cheerful giver. Those who give out of self-interest to receive a reward are not cheerful givers, for they act under an inner compulsion to seek their own good.³ Instead, Paul turns giving into a form of a spiritual discipline.

Paul makes a tie to giving as part of the commandments given by the Lord. The two great commandments of love to God and neighbor are inseparable and thus the people are called to tie giving as part of God's commandment. As the people give, they participate in a form of worship. With financial generosity, glory is brought to God.⁴ The people will be able to grow in their walk with Jesus.

There is another benefit to Corinthians participating in giving. As they give, they will be seen differently by the Jerusalem church. No longer will Gentile Christian converts be seen as a threat to Christianity. They will be seen as part of the body of Christ.

¹ Best, Ernest. "Second Corinthians," *Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 2012), 84.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid., 86.

⁴ Ibid., 87.

Application

If you take any spiritual gifts inventory, you will discover generosity is one of the gifts a person can possess. My experience with people who possess this gift is they are not only generous with their resources as they are also generous with their praise, their time, and their energy. Generosity is not just tied to money; it can also be tied to the life we lead.

Yet as Paul makes the case, generosity is not just tied to being a spiritual gift. Generosity is also tied with the way we order our lives together as Christians. When we practice generosity, we are acknowledging the abundance of gifts we possess to share with God and those around us. We are saying yes to the possibilities of ministry and an opportunity to give beyond something solely benefitting ourselves.

Before any of us can protest about when and why to give, I imagine all of us to go and sit in our main place of worship. Look around you at the wall, the windows, the furniture, and everything in the space. Did these things just appear out of nowhere? No. All of these things came because the people of God before us felt moved and stirred to give so we might have sacred places to come and worship.

Generosity, if wanting a basis for what it does for the here and now, is something which gives to those who come after us in the Christian faith. As we give to the church, we are establishing something not just our biological descendants, but for our spiritual descendants as well. All of us in this life have been given something because someone before us sought to give what they possessed for the glory of God's kingdom.

As we read of Paul's words to the church in Corinth, we are invited to do some soul searching about our own generosity. Do we give to the church because we know financial offering might mean a place on the Trustees or SPRC? Or do we give so we might have the opportunity to have our name attached to something so people can know we gave?

There is nothing wrong for wanting to sit on a committee or giving something in memorial or honor of someone. Where it becomes slippery is when we think the generosity can be regulated to benefit us and we can receive what we think we want or need. It begins to fall out of the realm of generosity to being more of a paid contract.

For Paul, generosity is a discipline which will help people feel more connected to God and to one another. As people give, they grow in their walk with Christ and contribute to the body of Christ in ways they never could have imagined. They become transformed as new creations in Christ.

Generosity is very much a discipline we are called to practice today. We know of the importance of tithing and how it helps us to be connected to God and to our church. Yet we also hear in today's scripture what generosity does in our walk with the Lord. As we give, we become more appreciative and feel more joy. We become more thankful for what we have in this life and can see all the beautiful ways God is at work around us. Generosity transforms us to be part of God's healing agents in a world focused on selfishness and greed.

The beautiful thing with generosity is we can practice it in all sorts of ways. We can give financially and see how our dollars can transform the places we live. We can give of ourselves spiritually and see how the use of our spiritual gifts benefits those around us. We can give of our time and energy and see the fruit of being generous as we become more committed and attuned to those around us. Generosity can be a way we draw closer in our walk with Jesus and become faithful disciples ready for the future ahead of us.

Why do you think generosity is so important to the Christian journey? How has the generosity of others positively impacted you? What are the ways you can grow in generosity? Who are generous people in your life and how have you seen their generosity impact others? How will you grow in generosity?

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