

This message was prepared by Rev. Pamela Graf Short for the people of prayer of the Tontogany Presbyterian Church for September fifteenth, the fourteenth Sunday after Pentecost, in the year of our LORD two thousand and nineteen.

I Kings 17:1-17

1 Now Elijah the Tishbite, of Tishbe in Gilead, said to Ahab, "As the Lord the God of Israel lives, before whom I stand, there shall be neither dew nor rain these years, except by my word."

2 The word of the Lord came to him, saying,

3 "Go from here and turn eastward, and hide yourself by the Wadi Cherith, which is east of the Jordan.

4 You shall drink from the wadi, and I have commanded the ravens to feed you there."

5 So he went and did according to the word of the Lord; he went and lived by the Wadi Cherith, which is east of the Jordan.

6 The ravens brought him bread and meat in the morning, and bread and meat in the evening; and he drank from the wadi.

7 But after a while the wadi dried up, because there was no rain in the land.

8 Then the word of the Lord came to him, saying,

9 "Go now to Zarephath, which belongs to Sidon, and live there; for I have commanded a widow there to feed you."

10 So he set out and went to Zarephath. When he came to the gate of the town, a widow was there gathering sticks; he called to her and said, "Bring me a little water in a vessel, so that I may drink."

11 As she was going to bring it, he called to her and said, "Bring me a morsel of bread in your hand."

12 But she said, "As the Lord your God lives, I have nothing baked, only a handful of meal in a jar, and a little oil in a jug; I am now gathering a couple of sticks, so that I may go home and prepare it for myself and my son, that we may eat it, and die."

13 Elijah said to her, "Do not be afraid; go and do as you have said; but first make me a little cake of it and bring it to me, and afterwards make something for yourself and your son.

14 For thus says the Lord the God of Israel: The jar of meal will not be emptied and the jug of oil will not fail until the day that the Lord sends rain on the earth."

15 She went and did as Elijah said, so that she as well as he and her household ate for many days.

16 The jar of meal was not emptied, neither did the jug of oil fail, according to the word of the Lord that he spoke by Elijah.

II Corinthians 8:1-17

We want you to know, brothers and sisters, about the grace of God that has been granted to the churches of Macedonia;

for during a severe ordeal of affliction, their abundant joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part.

For, as I can testify, they voluntarily gave according to their means, and even beyond their means, begging us earnestly for the privilege of sharing in this ministry to the saints—

and this, not merely as we expected;

they gave themselves first to the Lord and, by the will of God, to us,

so that we might urge Titus that, as he had already made a beginning, so he should also complete this generous undertaking among you.

Now as you excel in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in utmost eagerness, and in our love for you—so we want you to excel also in this generous undertaking.

I do not say this as a command,

but I am testing the genuineness of your love against the earnestness of others.

For you know the generous act of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich.

And in this matter I am giving my advice:

it is appropriate for you who began last year not only to do something but even to desire to do something—
now finish doing it,
so that your eagerness may be matched by completing it according to your means.
For if the eagerness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has—not according to what one does
not have.
I do not mean that there should be relief for others and pressure on you,
but it is a question of a fair balance between your present abundance and their need, so that their abundance
may be for your need,
in order that there may be a fair balance.
As it is written,
"The one who had much did not have too much, and the one who had little did not have too little."
But thanks be to God who put in the heart of Titus the same eagerness for you that I myself have.
For Titus not only accepted our appeal, but since he is more eager than ever, he is going to you of his own
accord.

Good News of Luke 6:17-38

"But I say to you that listen, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you,
bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you.
If anyone strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also;
and from anyone who takes away your coat do not withhold even your shirt.
Give to everyone who begs from you;
and if anyone takes away your goods, do not ask for them again.
Do to others as you would have them do to you.
"If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you?
For even sinners love those who love them.
If you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you?
For even sinners do the same.
If you lend to those from whom you hope to receive, what credit is that to you?
Even sinners lend to sinners, to receive as much again.
But love your enemies, do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return.
Your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High;
for God is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked.
Be merciful, just as your Heavenly Parent is merciful.
"Do not judge, and you will not be judged;
do not condemn, and you will not be condemned.
Forgive, and you will be forgiven;
give, and it will be given to you.
A good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap;
for the measure you give will be the measure you get back."

In our Bible stories for today generosity is celebrated and beggars are the ones who bless the rest of us.

Let's get it right out there:

Whether it is **Jesus** in his Sermon on the Plain
or Paul in his letter to the church at Corinth,
the communication style is pretty much the same:

Listen up!

This is what you ought to do.
Get to it and you'll get a blessing.

Jesus makes the assumption that someone who is following God is going to live a little differently;
well, maybe a lot differently than
the average grocery store manager
or the typical soccer mom
or the normal electrical engineer
or the common substitute teacher.
The standard is pretty high.
Be merciful as your Heavenly Parent is merciful. Don't worry about loving people who love you—
most people are fairly good at that.

Listen up!

Love your enemies;
lend without expecting to get pay back
and do some good deeds along the way.

Paul's standard is slightly lower than Jesus, but only slightly.
Paul uses the example of the Macedonians to guilt the Corinthians into action.
Now Macedonia itself was a very wealthy region in Greece,
but it just so happened that they were not very fond of Christians.

When Paul first goes there and meets some women who are God-fearing who are praying by a river.
It seems that they are fairly well off. Lydia, a business woman sells purple cloth; it was kind of an expensive fabric. Now "the LORD opened her heart to listen eagerly to what Paul said".
Lydia and all her household get baptized
and then she insists that Paul and his fellow missionaries stay in her home.
(Acts 16).

But somewhere between that story and today's bible story,
the Christians of Macedonia suffer a retched persecution.
It seems that they are now living in such abject poverty that they are like destitute beggars.
Still, when they hear that a collection is being taken up for the poor in Jerusalem, the Macedonians do not say,
"Hey! What about us?!"
Instead from their beggary, they beg Paul to let them give and give again to the Saints in Jerusalem.

In Paul's letter he calls Jesus a beggar.

*9 For you know the generous act of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich,
yet for your sakes he became poor,*

so that

*by his poverty
you might become rich.*

The Greek here can be translated thus:

*9 For you know the generous act of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich,
yet for your sakes he became a beggar*

so that

*by his beggaring
you might become rich.*

FRED B. CRADDOCK says coming upon these words while reading the eighth chapter of Second Corinthians is similar to the experience of stepping suddenly into a deep pool while wading a stream.
(Craddock, Fred., "The Poverty of Christ: An Investigation of II Corinthians 8:9," *Interpretation*, 1968.)

We think Paul is talking about writing a little check

or pulling some coins out of your pocket—

as easy as dipping our feet in a cool stream on a hot day.

But suddenly our giving is set against Jesus' sacrifice and we are pulled right under;

we find we have plunged so deeply into the wells of generosity that our own strength can never get us to the top.

It is only through the Resurrection Love of God that we can take a fresh breath.

...

As American citizens we are told

that we don't have enough;

that we will never have enough;

that we must live in fear of losing what we have.

As citizens of the Kingdom of God we are told

that God's generosity is exceedingly, abundantly, above all we could ask or imagine.

The American economic strategy is

"take what you can take when you can take it or it will be gone".

God's economic strategy is

give what you can give when you can give it

and the jug of oil will not run dry

and the jar of meal will not fail. (I Kings 17:14)

"give, and it will be given to you.

A good measure,

pressed down,

shaken together,

running over,

will be put into your lap;

for the measure you give

will be the measure you get back." (Luke 6:38)

Still, just a verse or two before,
Jesus is saying
“Love” even if it means no one will love you in return
“do good” even when it means no one will treat you right
“lend” even when it means not getting a penny back.

I feel like Jesus is sending a double message.
Don't expect anything.
But wait! You have can expect everything.
Don't do your human acts of kindness so that people will be kind to you.
They might. Or they might not.
Do your human acts of kindness because God has been kind to you when you didn't deserve;
God has been kind to me when I didn't deserve it a bit.

Actually, the measure you give is not really the measure you get back, is it?

Maybe what Jesus is saying if you give a bushel,
I will use a bushel to measure what you get back;
if you give a cup, I will use a cup to measure out what you get back,
only when I hand it back to you it will be pressed down and shaken together and running over!

The idea is that in God's economy, there is no out-giving God. In God's economy grace is like a grain hopper filled and overfilled with grain spilling on the earth with no need for alarm, because there is more where that comes from.

In God's economy grace is like grandma's Thanksgiving feast with a table full and overflowing with love!

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Paul encourages us to be eager to give. I like that idea. Eager to Give!

It is counter cultural.
I can be anxious to keep, or I can be eager to give.

Listen up Tontogany!

You can be anxious to keep,
or you can be eager to give.
You can follow the example of the Macedonians, who begged Paul to allow them to give more,
Or you can zip your purses shut and guard your billfolds.
You can worry that your church is going to close because there is not enough money to pay your new pastor,
or you can be eager to give and beg to give some more.

As a pastor sometimes people ask me where they should give or how much they should give.
Do your children have enough food?
Then be eager to give to the hungry.
Do your children have coats for the winter?
Then be eager to give to the naked.
Is your house standing?
Then be eager to give to those who have no house.
Has someone passed onto you the Good News of God's Love?
Then be eager to support missions who take the Gospel to the ends of the earth.

Do the people of the church pray for your children,
sing praises to God with them,
teach them the way of salvation,
encourage their spiritual gifts,
speak words of kindness,
and call them by name?
Then be eager to give to your church.
And once you've done that, beg to give some more.

Listen up Tontogany!

The Macedonians were poor.
You are not poor.
Like the church of Corinth you have enough
and much more than enough.
You can chose anxiety or you can chose eagerness.
God has made God's choice.
God has eagerly chosen you.
Jesus became a beggar for your sake.
What now is your choice?

Now may our Generous God
Fill up your hearts with gratitude
Fill up your voices with praise
Fill up your hands with goodness
Fill up your neighborhoods with justice
Fill up your homes with love
And fill up your church with
Exceedingly, abundantly,
above all you can ask or even imagine
Now and for a thousand generations.