

Giving 'Til It Feels Good
2 Corinthians 9:6-15
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I love this time of year at Peace. Our snowbirds are returning. The air is cooling, and we get to talk about Gratitude! Oh yes, some of you are cynically thinking, “Gratitude goes hand-in-hand with talk about Giving.” You are right. It does. But it all starts with God’s abundance. We are so richly blessed by God. If we get in the habit of noticing that, of counting our blessings, then our gratitude grows. And when your gratitude grows to overflowing, you want to do something, you have to do something. You want to give your time, your time, and your treasure to say thanks to God, to help someone else feel God’s blessing. So giving is supposed to be a joyful action.

We talk sometimes about sacrificial giving. We talk about parents and their sacrifices for their children. We talk about marriage and caring for parents – how we sacrifice to demonstrate our love. On Veterans Day week-end, we talk about the amazing sacrifices that some have made to protect us. We are grateful to them.

And last week on All Saints Sunday, when I was inviting you to consider what might be your legacy, there were Christians in Southerland Springs, Texas, whose lives, many of them young lives, were being cut short by misplaced rage. There is no room for rage in the Christian life.

We have a role to play in teaching peace. That’s why we are here. Our mission is to make God known by growing as disciples of Jesus Christ, building a community of peace, and caring for the needs of others.

We are doing our small part to make a difference in a world that is torn apart by racism, rage arising from families, and religious and political warfare. We can show people there is another way – there is way of living in grace and gratitude with God that brings meaning to life, that brings comfort when all seems wrong, that bring peace and hope to those who are despairing. It is this life that took hold of the Apostle Paul, even after he had been persecuting the Christians.

Yet his eyes were opened to see the wonder of Christ's love and his heart became eternally grateful. Let's hear his inspiration to the church at Corinth, a church in an eclectic port city, a place where the church was filled with the Spirit but sometimes lost its focus. Hear in this passage his call to one group of Christians to help another community of Christians. He invites them and us to be cheerful givers, because we know the abundant blessings of God. We know that though Christ was rich, he became poor for our sakes, that we through his poverty may become rich.

2 Corinthians 9:6-15

The point is this: the one who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and the one who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. ⁷ Each of you must give as you have made up your mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. ⁸ And God is able to provide you with every blessing in abundance, so that by always having enough of everything, you may share abundantly in every good work. ⁹ As it is written, "He scatters abroad, he gives to the poor; his righteousness endures forever." ¹⁰ He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness. ¹¹ You will be enriched in every way for your great generosity, which will produce thanksgiving to God through us; ¹² for the rendering of this ministry not only supplies the needs of the saints but also overflows with many thanksgivings to God. ¹³ Through the testing of this ministry you glorify God by your obedience to the confession of the gospel of Christ and by the generosity of your sharing with them and with all others, ¹⁴ while they long for you and pray for you because of the surpassing grace of God that he has given you. ¹⁵ Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!

(NRS)

People who live close to the earth, who know farming, are aware that if you want a good harvest, you cannot toss out a few cheap seeds. No, you need to invest in good and ample seed so that you grow more plants and have more seeds for the following year. Just like it takes capital to start a new business. You must make a serious investment to get a business rolling.

Same with raising children, you make a serious investment of your time, your energy, and your emotional, mental, spiritual and fiscal resources. And some seeds do not mature as well as others, but you can be sure, if you do not provide adequate nourishment and nurture, the seeds will not grow as they should.

Same with the church. It takes the investment of time, talent, and treasure to make the church grow and mature into a healthy branch of the Christian faith. The larger the branch, the more nourishment and care needed. So that's why we are bringing out commitments this week and next – because we know a church must be well-supplied to be healthy and we will be enriched for giving.

Okay, I have a joke for you, thanks to the Dial Hope email in my box this week: In the early days of texting a college son decided to help his father along – teach Dad how to text. His first text to dad was of course about his financial need. “No mon. No fun. Your son.” The father not to be out-witted, texted back, “Too bad. So sad. Your dad.”

Well, some of you may think we are like the college kid, always asking for money. I'd like to say we are always reminding you to pay it forward because you've been richly blessed. You do not have to say “yes” to every special offering and opportunity any more than you have to buy something in every store when you walk through the mall or pay attention to every ad on your web browser. But what we offer you is better than what those stores offer: we offer the joy of making a difference and feeling good about your spending.

If we do not ask you to make a commitment to God in response to all that God has given you, then we are encouraging you to be simply a consumer of Christianity, rather than a participant in the faith. We invite you to invest in something that matters so much you can get a great big warm feeling of cheer just thinking about what you are giving.

Cheerful giving is a sign that you are eager to see the church grow and develop, that you know it takes more than time and talent to put walls up and pay the bills, and nurture the faith of children, and care for people in great need. It takes more than a hope and a prayer. It takes commitment of time and money.

But we do not want this opportunity to feel burdensome to you. We want you to give until it feels good. We want you to think about lives being changed when you write that check or set up electronic giving or auto-drafts. Think about a family re-united after many years an ocean apart. Think of a college student who may not have made it to senior year without confidence-building experiences in your homes and at Montreat. Think about a high school student who made some big mistakes and could not talk to the parents but had a youth leader to confide in. Think about a choir member needing some laughter and a song in her heart. Think about the person who had acquaintances but needed a true confidant in the pastor, or a Stephen Minister or a close friend at church. Think about the beautiful music you heard in the youth orchestra at 8:30 last week. When you write that check for \$25 or \$250/week, for \$100 or \$1000 each month think about these changed lives and how you participated by your commitment and generosity.

When you give to the building fund, smile as you think of the hearing loop, and the carpet and the paint, the cross and communion table. Imagine your gift right now paying for those doors wide open to welcome anyone, everyone in. And be even happier to know that Peace will always be generous toward all those outside our doors, people in need, and will budget and manage funds responsibly.

No grumpy, guilty givers. If you don't feel great about what you have put on that page, pray for joy and wait 'til next week. God asks for cheerful givers. Only God and you know what you can do. All gifts overflow in thanksgiving when given in joy. But when you make a commitment of any kind, it is a big boost of encouragement to the elders, ministry team leaders, staff, and the Gratitude Team that you did -- children, youth, adults. It's not binding like a mortgage, it is always adjustable. This is the joy -- that we come together on this, doing together far more than we could do alone. Doing it with smiles on our faces. Like this little kid in poverty, who has nearly no food, but offers a bite to the photographer. Because we trust God to provide for us and we know that we are doing our small part to make this world a more peaceful, loving, hope-filled place in the name of Jesus Christ and by the power of the Spirit. Amen!