

## Scripture and Message

30 June 2024

### **Scripture: 2 Corinthians 8:7-15 NRSV**

<sup>7</sup> 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. <sup>8</sup> I do not say this as a command, but I am testing the genuineness of your love against the earnestness of others. <sup>9</sup> 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.

<sup>10</sup> 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--<sup>11</sup> now finish doing it, so that your eagerness may be matched by completing it according to your means. <sup>12</sup> For if the eagerness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has--not according to what one does not have.

<sup>13</sup> 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 <sup>14</sup> your present abundance and their need, so that their abundance may be for your need, in order that there may be a fair balance. <sup>15</sup> 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."

Hear what the Spirit is saying to the church.

**Thanks be to God.**

### **Message: In Need and In Abundance**

We're back in Second Corinthians this morning. This part of the letter needs some set up. This is about the mission collection for the Jerusalem Church. Missional or outreach collection – perhaps as United Methodists we could call it shared ministries, except that this isn't a tithe or dues being sent into an administrative arm of the church, this really is a collection for the poor and needy of a congregation in another country.

The Christians in Jerusalem were poor and needy. They didn't have much and didn't have enough to support each other. Paul asked the churches in Asian and Europe, the churches with both Jews and Gentiles, to take up a collection for their less fortunate siblings. Siblings who started this whole Christian thing, siblings who exported the words and grace of Jesus to places like Corinth.

In a way, this is like the Korean and Southern Nigerian Methodist Churches sending missionaries back to the United States and Europe to rekindle and rebuild the Christian churches that first sent the words and grace of Jesus to Korea and Nigeria. This portion of the letter is Paul's stewardship letter to the church.

It is really about taking up a collection. Paul is raising money to be sent back to Jerusalem to support the Original Church, to care for the poor in the capital city. But for Paul, and for Jesus, it is never simply about money. Instead, it is about faith, about the fruits of faith, the actions that come out of our faith in Jesus. How followers of Jesus live out their generosity is a reflection of their faith both in the first century and in the twenty-first century. This is how Carla Works, New Testament Professor at Wesley Theological Seminary, puts it:

*How believers use their resources — time, money, talents, and attention — is a reflection of what they believe about God and God's actions in the world. Furthermore, how those resources are used preaches a message to others. Paul wants the Corinthians' actions to be a reflection of the gospel in which they believe.<sup>1</sup>*

So, last week's text was an invitation to not receive the grace of God in vain, to accept cheap grace and this week, Paul provides one way for that grace to be seen in their lives and announced to the church as a whole. Besides, this is something the Corinthian church has already started. Paul writes, "it is appropriate for you who began last year not only to do something but even to desire to do something--<sup>11</sup> now finish doing it, so that your

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<sup>1</sup> Carla Works, "Commentary on 2 Corinthians 8:7-5," Working Preacher, <https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/reviced-common-lectionary/ordinary-13-2/commentary-on-2-corinthians-87-15>.

eagerness may be matched by completing it according to your means.” (2 Corinthians 8:10b-11) Paul points out that they are already doing this, already taking up this collection, so why not complete it? Why not see it through?

But some of Paul’s wording is a little awkward. Paul says to the Corinthian church that they “began … not only to do something but even to desire to do something” (2 Corinthians 8:10). They began to not only take up the collection out of duty because Paul asked them to do it, but because they began to want to do it. The Corinthian congregation began to want to send money to the Jerusalem congregation. They wanted to reach out, they wanted to be in ministry together with the Christians of Jerusalem. We’re back to that open-heart thing. Paul wants us to give, but he wants our hearts in it too, not that the value of our giving is measured by the depth of our desire to give, but that **grace** is at work in us, God is at work in us, evidently at work in us, when our desires match our actions. Paul commended the Corinthian church for their giving, but also for their wanting to give.

And Paul is encouraging them to give and desire to give as much as they can. Yet, he does recognize the limitations of resources. That’s what Paul is saying when he writes, “I do not mean that there should be relief for others and pressure on you” (2 Corinthians 8:13) Paul is not asking them to bankrupt themselves, but to give what they can, a gift “according to what one has” (v.12). Then there is a hint that too much is too much. Your need in abundance is met by their need in lack. And maybe when the wheel turns and you are lacking, then their abundance will meet your need. It is a relationship.

But I want to draw our attention back to our quote from Dr. Works. Our resources are not just money. Our resources are our time, money, talents, and attention. Sometimes giving money is the easiest way to share our resources. We all know the phrase, just throw money at it.

But our community, God’s kin-dom, needs more than our financial resources. How are we using our talents? How are we using our time? Where are we putting our attention?

When I think about my life, my family, I ask myself what needs my time, who needs my attention? These are often the two hardest resources for me to give, and often the most precious to receive.

As most of you know, my Dad died 25 years ago this month. My Dad was quiet, extremely introverted, and so my Mom was the one who made everything work in our family. She was the one who paid attention, she was the one who bought birthday presents and sent cards and care packages. She was the doer, and my Dad stood in the background and did whatever was necessary to back her up. Dad worked all day, leaving before we got on the school bus and arriving home in the late evening during the week, and then he did chores all weekend. Mom was there for us before and after school; she always had time for us, Dad didn’t – he couldn’t spend as much time with us as Mom did – so my most precious memories of my Dad are from the times we had real conversations. When Dad and I did stuff together. One summer I worked with him at IBM. Talking with him on the hour long drives back and forth are some of the best conversations I had with my Dad; that time was precious – that was time when I had Dad’s attention.

Where will you spend your time this week? What will have your attention? Will you give some time and attention to God? To the church? To your family? To yourself? Where will you desire to spend your most precious resources? Paul is asking us to remember our relationship as the church universal, the body of Christ in Dryden. We are one in the body of Christ. We share our time, our talent, our money and our attention *as one* in the body of Christ. It’s an ideal, I admit. Yet we strive for it anytime and every time we open our doors, open our church, open our arms, open our hearts. And whether we have more than enough or whether we are lacking, we find help and hope in the body, hope in the relationship within the community of faith to whom we have opened our whole selves.