

Consecration Sunday, June 30, 2024

Pastor Peter Gregory, Our Savior Lutheran Church, Westminister, Massachusetts

Generous God, Generous Christians

2 Corinthians 8:9–15; Lamentations 3:22–27; the Small Catechism

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Eph 1:2

First, from 2 Corinthians, chapter 8: ⁹ **For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, so that you by His poverty might become rich.** ¹⁰ **And in this matter I give my judgment: this benefits you, who a year ago started not only to do this work but also to desire to do it.** ¹¹ **So now finish doing it well, so that your readiness in desiring it may be matched by your completing it out of what you have.** ¹² **For if the readiness is there, it is acceptable according to what a person has, not according to what he does not have.** ¹³ **For I do not mean that others should be eased and you burdened, but that as a matter of fairness** ¹⁴ **your abundance at the present time should supply their need, so that their abundance may supply your need, that there may be fairness.** ¹⁵ **As it is written, “Whoever gathered much had nothing left over, and whoever gathered little had no lack.”**

And from Lamentations, chapter 3: ²² **The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases; His mercies never come to an end;** ²³ **they are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness.** ²⁴ **“The LORD is my portion,” says my soul, “therefore I will hope in Him.”** ²⁵ **The LORD is good to those who wait for Him, to the soul who seeks Him.** ²⁶ **It is good that one should wait quietly for the salvation of the LORD.** ²⁷ **It is good for a man that he bear the yoke in his youth.**

The Bible doesn't give us a detailed description of what life was like in the first-century church. We can piece together a little bit from the Book of Acts, the letters of St. Paul, and other writings, but it's certainly not a full picture of how the church was organized. For example: Did those first congregations have a budget process? Who handled the offerings—collecting and counting them? Who paid for stuff? How were benevolence requests dealt with? Where did they get the bread and wine for Holy Communion? Who set it up? Who cleaned up? Did they have greeters or hosts? Who lit the candles? Who made the coffee for their fellowship time? Did mothers have a place to take loud and wiggly kids? Did anyone record the services by writing down what was said? They must have had some way of doing things, but we simply don't know what that was. We

don't have any early-church job descriptions, consecration forms, or servitor lists. That makes it difficult to connect the dots from their time to ours, doesn't it?

One thing we do have is St. Paul urging the Gentile churches to give an offering for the poor of the church back in Jerusalem. This financial support was especially needed because Jerusalem was experiencing a famine. And it seems that this collection was Paul's idea. "**Remember the poor,**" he'd written to the Galatians (2:10), echoing Jesus who first told the rich young ruler to "**give to the poor**" (Mk 10:21). So one part of the church is called upon to serve and help another part of the church. St. Paul puts this front-and-center in the verses I read from Second Corinthians chapter eight. He doesn't hesitate to remind the church in Corinth of what others are doing or to appeal to the way God has poured out His riches on them. He invites them to show genuine love by caring for the wider body. Paul describes this as grace, service, participation in a common life, abundance, blessing, and love. It's a matter of consistency. As another pastor put it, "One cannot be full of Christian love and devotion, full of prayer and kindness, and yet [be] a miser."ⁱ

The idea that individual Christians would do their own thing or have independent spiritual lives is foreign to Paul's way of thinking. So is the idea of Christian congregations being disconnected from one another. The body of Christ needs each other. We see that right here among us. Think about all that goes into a Sunday morning at Our Savior, all the things big and little connected to Jesus being present with us in His Holy Word and Holy Communion.

Yet St. Paul doesn't turn the need of others into a command. He doesn't want to rob anyone of the joy of giving freely and volunteering. He simply makes clear that genuine love doesn't grudge to help others in their distress. Genuine love doesn't hesitate to serve the wider body when invited to do so. This is the way of the Christian because this is the way of Christ Himself: "**For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,**" St. Paul writes, "**that though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, so that you by His poverty might become rich**" (2 Cor 8:9). You've heard this before, but it's worth committing Second Corinthians eight verse nine to memory. It's one of the basic teachings of the Christian faith. St. Paul lays out the great exchange in such beautiful and simple words. Rich Jesus became poor so that poor us might become rich.

Just how rich was Jesus? As the Son of God, He was the Lord of heaven. He possessed the fullness of divine glory. Why, He owned the cattle on a thousand hills! And yet . . . when He became man, He wasn't conceived of a princess. He wasn't born in a palace. He wasn't surrounded with luxury. He volunteered instead for poverty and need, for hunger and homelessness, even for nakedness and abuse. You see the height of His

earthly poverty on the cross. Why did He do this? It wasn't to get something from us. Jesus didn't have a manipulative bone in His body. It was to give something to us. It was purely out of kindness, out of His eternal love for sinful, stingy, self-serving mankind.

And now you who were poor—even poor, pitiful sinners, dead in your trespasses—you are rich. Though you may not be rich in an earthly way, you are rich in a heavenly one. To you belong all the spiritual riches in heavenly places. Yours is the kingdom of heaven. He has given us the crown of life. He has **raised us up with [Jesus] and seated us with Him enthroned in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the coming ages He might show the immeasurable riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus** (Eph 2:6–7). With His holy, precious blood and with His innocent suffering and death, He has redeemed, purchased, and won you to be His own.

Jesus made that sacrifice for you. He continues to be generous with us beyond measure. Would you, then, make some sacrifice for your brothers and sisters in Christ? Having received the benefits of the great exchange with your Lord, will you make the little exchange for the sake of your neighbor? What do I mean? Will you give your time to pray when a request is made? Will you hand out bulletins, set up the altar, start the audio recording, or staff the nurse, so that others can hear God's Word and receive His gifts with us? Will you sacrificially support the work of our congregation with your offerings, the needs of your brothers and sisters through benevolence, and the work of the wider church through missions? Even if we can't give in every way, each of us has some measure of time, treasure, or talent to share.

Maybe you're already doing a lot. Thank you. Serving in the church often happens without notice or applause or a pat on the back. Your Father in heaven knows and sees what you do, even if no one else does. Your work matters. Remember, too, that Christ never stopped to compare His part with our part. He didn't say, "I'll pull my weight if you pull yours." He didn't do it for the praise. He did it for love. O love, how deep, how broad, how high!

The devil, of course, wants us to believe that God isn't generous. He wants us to believe that God is holding out. He would convince us that God is stingy and greedy and keeps the best for Himself. That's what he told Adam and Eve. That's what he'd tell us, too, if we'd listen. But it's a lie. One big, fat lie. The devil's second lie is like it. It's the lie that we've got to cling tightly to what we have and watch out for our own interests. It's the feeling that we can't spare what we have to help others. The devil loves nothing more than when we coil inward for self-preservation and look at the world through the lens of scarcity—as if there will never be enough to go around.

The truth, however, rests in what Jeremiah's Lamentations. Right at the heart of that sad tale of Jerusalem's destruction stands this beautiful reminder: ²² **The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases; His mercies never come to an end;** ²³ **they are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness.** ²⁴ **"The LORD is my portion,"** says my soul, **"therefore I will hope in Him."** ²⁵ **The LORD is good to those who wait for Him, to the soul who seeks Him.** ²⁶ **It is good that one should wait quietly for the salvation of the LORD** (Lam 3:22–26). The Lord Himself is your portion, dear Christian. What a portion He is! He is faithful, steady, and true. Unceasing love, never-ending mercies, great faithfulness, every morning, including this one. We wait for Him. We seek Him. And He gives us His salvation—the gifts of Christ now, the promise of more to come.

So the Bible doesn't give us detailed descriptions of the life of the early Church. It doesn't tell us how to do a Consecration Sunday or divide up the roles and responsibilities of our life together. But it does give us the riches of Christ and invites us into that rich and generous life. We can hear in the words of St. Paul three principles as well: First, the importance of readiness. Be eager, and look for opportunities to present themselves. Second, we exercise ourselves **"according to what a person has"** (2 Cor 8:12). Each has different gifts, means, and abilities. Lastly, there's a principle of reciprocity. We supply the needs of others, so that they in turn can supply our needs. This is the way it works in a family. That's also how it is here in the household of God. We love, serve, and **bear one another's burdens**, so fulfilling **the law of Christ** (Gal 6:2). And, as we do so, we pray: **O LORD, and be merciful to me! O LORD, be my helper!** (Ps 30:10)

The peace that passes all understanding guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

Phil 4:7

ⁱ <https://www.1517.org/articles/epistle-2-corinthians-81-9-13-15-pentecost-6-series-b-2024>