

“Generous Living and Giving”

II Corinthians 9: 6-15

November 15, 2020

As you are listening to this sermon, I pray that you were able to be part of our church’s Super Food Drive this weekend. Since I am recording this sermon on Thursday, I do not as yet know how many bags of food, socks, underwear, Styrofoam will be donated by our church and community, nor how many bags of communion supplies will be shared at our Saturday Super Food Drive which will have happened yesterday, when you are viewing this. But I know this: those who gave, those who collected and delivered the gifts, and those who received the gifts were exceedingly blessed, for we all lived the love of God in those moments of giving and receiving! What a blessed day to be the family of God, caring for one another and the earth, and experiencing as well as receiving holy communion in our cars!

Like the Apostle Paul wrote, “You are enriched in every way for your great generosity, which will produce thanksgiving to God through us; for the rendering of this ministry not only supplies the needs of the saints, but also overflows with many thanksgivings to God... Thanks be to God for this indescribable gift!” How powerful it is to enact the generous love of God, to give to others and pass on some of the many blessings our God has showered upon us! What a blessing for us to share! And, what a blessing for those who have no money for food, socks, underwear...and for the environment that cannot break down Styrofoam!

In our passage today, Paul first points out that God blesses us with enough, and in abundance – and our gratitude for God’s blessings given to us is a testimony to our trust and faith in God and Christ.

When was the last time you counted your blessings? Or sang that old hymn? I have a plaque at home that a church friend gave to me that says, “count the really good blessings twice!” What’s NOT a really good blessing?! So, I’m learning to count by twos, really well! How about you? Even in the midst of this pandemic, and especially in the midst of this pandemic, we here at UMCG have much to be grateful for, much for which we can thank God. As Paul writes, God provides us with every blessing in abundance, he multiplies our seeds for sowing, and increases our harvest of righteousness. For what we have received, may the Lord make us truly thankful!

Some of you may receive our conference newsletter, the UM Reporter. On the inside back page of the latest issue, Rev. Martin Lee, Director of Congregational Development for our conference, shared a story of the Korean United Methodist practice of giving extra offerings of thanksgiving to celebrate the blessings in their lives – for birthdays, anniversaries, births, healings, in memory of loved ones, etc. They are grateful to God, and so they give an offering to God to say thank you for these many blessings. They will put a separate envelope with their gift in the offering plate for each blessing. Just imagine how many offering envelopes **we** could fill and give to celebrate **our** blessings!

And when you think about it, don't most of our veterans give their lives in service to our country from this same kind of gratitude: for the freedoms and privileges this country gives them, they give their life in the country's service as a thank you, to ensure that these freedoms and privileges may continue to be enjoyed by us all... This past week as we remembered our Veterans on Veterans Day we gave thanks for the blessing of their lives generously given to ensure peace and freedom in our nation and world!

Secondly, Paul says, God gives us in abundance, so that "always having enough of everything, we may share abundantly in every good work."

Our giving to others allows us to be part of God's good work in our world today! Through our generosity, we get to be the hands and feet and heart of God to those who most need God's presence today! And, when we can be generous in person, giving our time, our personal presence as well as our presents, it is an even better gift, as we share God's love in word and in deed with others!

I want to give a shout out to all of you who are generously giving to our church, and to our mission projects with your financial gifts, your time, your cooking... This past Monday your Church in Society and Mission teams were able to plan the distribution of \$1500 each to most of our local and Caribbean mission projects that we support: from the Hesed to Lazarus House, the Salvation Army and Tricity Family Services, Grace Children's Hospital, Rebuilding Haiti, Kids Alive - all places where the needs are desperate as families lose jobs and fear they will lose homes as well. Thanks be to God for all of you who give so faithfully, so that we can pass on your gifts to these organizations who are blessing those in need, here and

abroad, now when these gifts are most needed. Thanks to your generosity, we can share abundantly in God's good work!

In the Book of Joy, which our Spirited Women's group just finished reading together, The Dalai Lama and Archbishop Desmond Tutu point out that being generous not only blesses those who receive, but it also blesses the givers – they share that science has proven that there are many health benefits on a personal level for generous people: lower blood pressure, greater longevity, better immune systems, as well as greater happiness and better relationships...and on a community level, we have stronger communities when we are generous people, because we now know that our lives are really interconnected and complementary to each other, more so than competitive. Ultimately, the Dalai Lama and Archbishop Tutu say, "Taking care of others, helping others, is the way to discover your own joy and to have a happy life."

Paul's third point is that our generous giving to others not only helps them to know God's presence and love, but inspires them to give thanks to God, to praise God, and to pray to God; in fact, it plants seeds of faith and grows their love for God, as they come to know God through us, our generous giving, and our generous living. Our example of living faith, grows others' faith!

So are we giving generously? Is our faith in God abundant and evident? Is God's love visible to others by our generosity? Are we giving cheerfully, joyfully, so that our love for God is heard in our voices, seen in our eyes, shared through our hands?

During this pandemic, it is often very challenging to find safe ways to give generously to others. The ways we used to give may put us and others at risk of passing on the virus. But as we make our way through this time of physical distancing, many are finding ways to practice generosity and kindness: by giving generous tips to low-paid essential workers, by writing cards of thanks to teachers, by having appreciation parades for nurses, by raking leaves or running errands for the elderly; by phoning neighbors who live alone... Epidemiologist Dr. Michael Osterholm makes a weekly podcast from the University of Minnesota, and encourages us to stay safe, and care for each other in a pandemic of kindness. I like that image! Let's make this a pandemic of generosity and kindness! I commend his podcast #29 to you, in particular, in which he gives tips

on how to live well through these next most difficult months of the pandemic. A link to this podcast should have been sent to you in your Friday church email.

It is not something new for Christians to be generous and kind during a pandemic. Author Lyman Stone, in an article for a recent issue of the publication *Foreign Policy*, points out that in fact, over the past 2000 years, Christians have been the ones known to care for the sick and dying during plagues. Rev. Martin Luther, in the 1500s, told Christians during the plague then to obey quarantines, to keep their homes clean, and to follow precautions as a service to their neighbors. He encouraged them not to endanger others by their negligence or recklessness. Sounds very similar to our pandemic practices today, does it not? Wear our masks, wash our hands, and keep a safe physical distance from one another so as not to spread the virus. Living and Giving Generously means loving our neighbor enough to inconvenience ourselves, to share resources and serve others in need, so that the whole beloved community of God has the opportunity to survive. As Dr Martin Luther King Jr. said so aptly, “We must learn to live together as brothers and sisters, or perish together as fools.”

In a few weeks, our church will be hosting a live nativity with people and animals, music and gifts for the community. We are calling this event our Christmas Story Caravan, in which we, with our sister churches in Batavia and St. Charles, enact the Christmas Story outdoors and encourage folks to experience and share the hope, love and light of God’s gift to us in Jesus Christ. It is an opportunity for us to invite neighbors, and friends to drive by our churches and receive gifts and give gifts that will bless them and others with God’s generous love. This Christmas Story Caravan is one way in which we as a church seek to bless others this Advent and Christmas, through the abundant faith and gifts God has given us. Please let your friends and neighbors know about this, share our publicity cards about it, and let us bless one another with this gift this Christmas.

In closing, let us recap the lessons from the apostle Paul in our text from II Corinthians for today:

Paul reminds us that, 1) not only does God bless us with **enough and abundantly**,

But also 2) God blesses us abundantly **so we can participate** in God's work of blessing others

And, 3) our participation in blessing others with God allows others to praise and thank God, and grow in faith.

What a miracle! Thanks be to God for this indescribable gift, that allows us to grow in living and giving generously, like Christ. May we ever be grateful and generous with our neighbors, for Christ's sake, Amen.

Pastor Lisa Telomen

Children's sermon

Hello young and young at heart people! Our theme for worship today is Living and Giving Generously. I want to share with you the job description of Dewey the Library cat from the small town of Spencer, Iowa. I have been enjoying reading his book, written by Vicki Myron, over the past week or so. Perhaps you have read books about him too? Dewey lived a generous life, 19 years in fact, taking care of his people at the Spencer Public Library. As I read his job description, it occurred to me that Dewey can perhaps teach us a few things about living and giving generously in these pandemic days, in our homes or at school and work:

Do some of you have pets? You may have a dog or cat, hamster or guinea pig, fish or lizards... Listen while I read Dewey's job description, and see if any of his tasks are things your pet does for your family, too. I am thinking there will be a few!
(read from sheet)

Does your pet do some of the work Dewey does? When you think about it, aren't some of Dewey's tasks, things that Jesus wants us to do for each other too? I think our pets can teach us a lot about Jesus' love and God's love for us and for everyone, don't you?

In fact, let me share with you how I think Jesus would revise Dewey's job description, for us humans:

Every day, try to: reduce each others' stress,

Greet everyone joyfully and lovingly, every day;

Try to care for everyone's safety and security;

Remember, you are to be ambassadors of respect and grace in all classes and at all meetings;

Try to offer comic relief, joy and happiness each day, to friends and strangers;

Each day, engage and participate in one another's lives in helpful and kind ways;

Try to live in such a generous, loving way that you are good publicity for Jesus Christ;

And lastly, enjoy and appreciate all delectable foods and share them widely with others, in holy communion with Christ and neighbors.

Amen!

Let's pray:

Thank you so much for our pets, God, who show us how to love each other and everyone really well! We are grateful for their love in our lives, and for the opportunity to care for them with kindness and generosity, like you care for us, God. Thank you especially for Jesus, who teaches us the height and depth, the length and breadth of your love for us, and who walks with us and talks with us and loves us every day. Help us to be generous friends like Jesus, with our family and all of our neighbors. In Jesus' name, Amen.