

**II Corinthians 8**  
**Begging to give**  
**July 8, 2018**  
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What is more rare than snow in July? No, it's not a win by the Orioles! What is more rare than snow in July, is a sermon on stewardship and money. Ha, ha!

But here we are continuing our exploration of St. Paul's ministry among the Corinthians. We've already talked about how the experience of God's unmerited, undeserved **grace** in Jesus Christ changes your whole life. The experience of grace – God's love for you, a fallen, flawed sinner – is the doorway to gratitude. **Once you know you are literally saved by grace, thanksgiving becomes a way of life not a just holiday in November.** The apostle tells us that everything that is good in our lives springs from the well of grace - God's undeserved and unmerited favor - and the only appropriate response to this grace is gratitude. Recall that quote by Karl Barth, *gratitude follows grace as thunder follows lightning.*

Then we explored Paul's notion of living by faith, moment-by-moment, secure in the knowledge that "this too shall pass", even when there is no visible evidence it will actually pass. *We live by faith, not by sight.* Our hope is not in ourselves alone, but rather in the mighty power of God to do more than we can imagine. It is God who provides when it appears we have no provisions and no way forward. But instead of stopping or turning around, or becoming paralyzed by fears in this present moment, we **walk** in faith, because we are confident in God's provisions. It's living out what Lady Julian of Norwich famously said, "**all shall be well, and all shall be well, and all manner of things shall be well.**" *Slide*

What most people don't know about Dame Julian is that she survived the plague that swept across England in the 14<sup>th</sup> century killing 5 million people. While she was on her deathbed, Julian received visions of divine love that she later wrote and were published as the Revelations of Divine Love. They testify to the goodness and love of God in all circumstances. She ought to know since she experienced the worst, and learned to live by **faith** and not by sight.

So having gone on a little detour to talk about grace and faith – the foundations of the Christian life – we turn to this remarkable story of sharing. By the way, don't you think **sharing-what-you-have** is just another way of saying stewardship?

Paul seems to think so. He spent much of his ministry collecting money from congregations to share with others so that no one would be suffering. The end point of all this sharing is equality – no one will have too much and no one will have too little.

Look, here is what's remarkable about this experience of grace: even though these folks were suffering from "extreme poverty," they were *begging* to give to the saints who were across the way in Jerusalem.

**SLIDE** *Can you imagine people begging to give? What would compel you to beg to give?*

What is most remarkable is the utter absence of talk about "how much" money is available to give. That's beside the point. It's beside the point for us, too. Paul is talking about a desire to give that comes from joy in God. Increase the joy of the Lord, and people **beg** to give to others. That's what stunning to me. When talking about money, it's so easy to get hung up on amounts, rather than desire. When the desire to give is present, abundance flows from a grateful heart. In this story, sharing becomes a circle of giving.

I love the proverb a Haitian farmer told me: "The one who never eats alone, will never go hungry." It was his way of saying when you share what little you have, you will always have enough for yourself. And he should know because few are in more extreme poverty than those in Haiti. Saint Paul is saying the same: when our hearts are rooted in God, trusting in God's faithfulness, you will always have enough to share.

Notice what happens when we share: ***everyone has enough; no one suffers.***

When you and I share what we have with others, it creates a groundswell of gratitude in the hearts of many, who in turn share what they have with others. Our sharing becomes part of a much larger work of God among people in the world. This desire to participate in God's work of caring among lives of others is what drove those Macedonians in "extreme poverty" to share. They want to be part of a larger work than their own small lives. This so often occurs when people of wealth and privilege serve alongside those who are poor. Whether in Montgomery County, Appalachia or Haiti: The categories often get flipped and the abundance of the poor becomes apparent alongside the poverty of the rich.

So it is that Jesus became poor that we might be rich. And having become rich in Christ, we share what we have so that others might have enough and beyond. No one is left empty. The circle of giving is profound and it perfectly reflects the giving of God in Jesus.

Among the remarkable things I heard about Barbara Bush when she died was her conviction about giving. She said:

***giving frees us***

***from the familiar territory of our own needs***

***by opening our mind to the unexplored worlds***

***occupied by the needs of others.***

**SLIDE**

I find this to be a summary of what it means to follow Jesus: away from our own familiar needs into the unexplored worlds of the needs of others.

Before I end, I must say how grateful I am so many of you have given abundantly to the ministry of this congregation and to sustain our legacy of service far into the future. You are a generous people.

I believe that is a sign of God's grace and your gratitude. Praise the Lord.

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Now to the One who by the power at work within us is able to do far more than we can ask or imagine, to God be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever.

Amen.