

**+ 2 Corinthians 9:6-15 + Using God's Gifts in His Service: Generously Serving the Lord +**  
**+ 22nd Sunday after Pentecost + 20 October 2013 +**

Two farmers went out to their fields to plant on a beautiful spring day. One farmer was a very realistic, even pessimistic, man. He knew what weather or disease could do to his crops. However, his respect for what problems lay ahead in the future verged on fear. In a very real way, he lacked trust in the ability of his gracious God to take care of him. The farmer was very frugal with everything he had, but his lack of trust turned frugality into stinginess. "How much should I really plant? What if we have too much rain or too little rain? What if blight hits my crops? I'll only put into the ground what needs to go in. If I plant more, it's just going to be wasted." Because of his lack of trust in God to provide the harvest, the farmer sowed sparingly.

The other farmer was also a realistic man, who knew exactly what problems weather or disease could cause to his crops. He, too, was a frugal man not being wasteful, but he also knew he had a God who had not only provided him the seed he was planting, but even the harvest he would reap great or small. He knew that this same Lord provided the food on his table, the roof over his head, the clothes on his back, and the machinery he was using. Above all, he knew the price his Savior paid to save him. For that reason, he never saw any reason to be stingy with what he received from his gracious God. He trusted that the Lord would provide the harvest. With a hopeful heart, the farmer planted the seed God had given him to plant.

When harvest time arrived in the fall, the fields reflected the attitudes of the farmers. Not surprisingly, the stingy farmer who failed to trust in what God could do brought in a weak harvest. The generous farmer, who trusted in his gracious Lord, brought in a greater harvest than he expected. He was just glad the Lord had provided the harvest, but the Lord blessed him even more. ***"Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously."***

Paul speaks these words to us this morning, and to be honest, they make us feel a little uncomfortable. When we take a closer look at our hearts and how we regard the gifts God graciously gives us, it's not hard to see how much more like the stingy farmer we really are. There's always a time for being frugal and not wasteful with the time, talents, and treasures we possess, but there are times when we fall into the trap of becoming stingy with those gifts. Being stingy in this case doesn't necessarily mean hoarding your money and refusing to spend anything. After all, it's very easy to spend plenty of time, money, and effort on yourself or your loved ones or on whatever you like to do. That comes naturally!

Yet when it comes to putting those gifts—your time, your efforts and talents, your money—to use serving the Lord, well, you start getting...stingy. "I just don't have any time." "I just couldn't do that. I wouldn't know what to do!" "We just can't fit an offering into our budget this month. Besides I've got nothing in my wallet today. Maybe next week or next month..." When it comes to serving the Lord with your gifts, there's a tendency to be like that stingy farmer—reluctant, hesitant, unwilling to do or give more than the bare minimum. Maybe you serve because that's what you're supposed to do as a member of a church and besides, no one else is going to do it. Yet is such dutiful service really cheerful, generous service to the Lord? Ultimately this stinginess towards serving the Lord comes from a heart that lacks trust in our gracious God.

The Corinthian Christians had the same problem. When they heard about a famine that had struck the city of Jerusalem, the Corinthians began gathering an offering to help their fellow believers. Before too long, though, their generosity of the moment slowed to a stop. So St. Paul encouraged them to renew their efforts in support of God's people in need. In doing so, he also taught them about generously serving the Lord with their gifts. ***"Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver."***

Paul called on the Corinthians to be like that hopeful, cheerful, generous farmer. "Think about what you're going to give to the Lord, then give to the Lord with a cheerful heart—not forced, not reluctantly, not unwilling, but generously and cheerfully." Paul didn't so much care about the amount, but about their cheerful trust in the Lord who had generously given them everything they had.

Paul's words apply to us today too. ***"God loves a cheerful giver."*** How are we going to do that? How can we possibly give of our time, our talents, our treasures when each of us has a stingy, untrusting sinful nature that wants all that only for ourselves? How is our gracious Lord going to help us, if we can't? Paul explains, ***"And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work. As it is written: 'He has scattered abroad his gifts to the poor; his righteousness endures forever.'"***

***"God is able to make all grace abound to you..."*** God's cure for a stingy heart is a strong dose of his grace—his undeserved, self-sacrificing, loving kindness for sinners who hate him. Just consider for a moment how God's grace has overflowed like a rushing river from his open hand to you. In his infinite wisdom and gracious mercy, the Lord

planned from eternity to save you. When he promised a Savior to our first parents, the Lord also had you and your eternal rescue in mind. When the right time came, God sent his Son to be that Savior in your place. He made himself weak to make you strong. He made himself poor to make you rich. He endured your weakness as an infant, as a baby, as a child, as a tween, as a teen, as an adult. He endured temptation. He endured hardship and need. He endured suffering and pain—all while generously and perfectly serving our God.

There was nothing stingy about the grace God showed you in Christ Jesus—even to the point of sacrificing the life of his Son on the cross. That flood of grace that flowed from the wounds of our Savior washed you clean of your sins of reluctance and lack of trust and stinginess towards God. Then that same grace burst forth for you from an empty tomb on Easter morning.

Leap ahead 2,000 years mindful of how God in his grace guided human history to bring you into this world and to bring you into contact with his Gospel through your parents or a friend or a pastor, bringing you to faith through the hearing of his Word and the cleansing waters of Holy Baptism. Recall how the Lord in his grace has lavished his mercy on you when you have fallen, his strength on you when you were weak, his peace on you when you were troubled, his healing on you when were hurt. Recall how he has blessed you with food on your table, clothes on your back, a roof over your head, and a source of income. Recall how he has provided you with family, even a “family” of brothers and sisters in Christ. Recall how our God has **“scattered abroad his gifts to the poor”**, how **“his righteousness endures forever”**—that righteous judgment he made in your favor because of what his Son did for you. If our God was able to pour out such a flood of grace in our past, surely he can do even more in our future.

**“Now he who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will also supply and increase your store of seed and will enlarge the harvest of your righteousness. You will be made rich in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God.”** The Lord provides all things richly to every one of us. He provides for our physical needs and more. He provides for our spiritual needs and more. God provides **“the harvest of...righteousness”**. He blesses you as you serve him with your time, with your talents and efforts, and with your treasures. He will not impoverish you when you use his gifts in his service. He promises to enrich you through your generosity. Now that doesn't mean that if you pray hard enough, God is going to give you a 16,000 sq. ft. mansion and an annual salary of \$10 million, but the Lord does promise to bless the cheerful, faithful, generous service of his people.

When you use your time, your talents, your treasures to serve your Lord, you become his hand of blessing for others. Just within the ministry of our congregation, the Lord uses you to bless others. Perhaps it's the time you take to invite someone to worship and tell them about their Savior. Perhaps it's the gifts you use to provide a worship experience that's not only done with excellence, but brings glory to our God. Perhaps it's the treasures that you give not to church, but to the Lord to support the ministry here and in places across our country and world so more people can hear the Gospel. Yet through all that, God blesses you with joy, confidence, peace, and more!

God's generosity leads to our generosity, which results in his praise. **“This service that you perform is not only supplying the needs of God's people but is also overflowing in many expressions of thanks to God. Because of the service by which you have proved yourselves, people will praise God for the obedience that accompanies your confession of the gospel of Christ, and for your generosity in sharing with them and with everyone else. And in their prayer for you their hearts will go out to you, because of the surpassing grace God has given you.”**

The Lord's generosity towards us, especially in sending his Son, is truly breathtaking not just because of what he gives us, but in what results from that boundless generosity towards his people. The Lord in his grace supplies the needs of all creatures, but especially of his people, which results in **“overflowing in many expressions of thanks to God.”**

As a mission congregation, we have experienced repeatedly that overflow of the generosity of God's people. We rejoice because of the generosity of God's people in our church body that the Lord has used to provide us with financial subsidy, with special gifts for our work in Watertown and towards our building expansion, with mission and ministry support, with the training of our pastors, with prayers on our behalf, and even with teams of young men and women who have come to help us spread the Gospel.

...But now it's our turn! Now it's our turn to respond with generous hearts filled to overflowing with God's grace. Now it's our turn to serve the Lord with the gifts he's given us here and now to his eternal praise. Now it's our turn to faithfully support the work of the Gospel here and abroad—to be generous with our time and talents in service to the Lord, to be generous in our offerings to the Lord from the supply he's given us, to be generous in our prayers for others and for the Gospel ministry. With cheerful, confident, generous hearts motivated by Christ's love, we faithfully use God's gifts in his service. May your service result in eternal thanks to our gracious God and for the indescribable gift of his grace from us and many others! Amen.