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Reformation L.C.
II Corinthians 9:6-15

The Cheerful Giver

Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. 7Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. 8And 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 [all] good work. 9As it is written: "He has scattered abroad his gifts to the poor; his righteousness endures forever." 10Now 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. 11You 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. 12This 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. 13Because of the service by which you have proved yourselves, men 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. 14And in their prayers for you their hearts will go out to you, because of the surpassing grace God has given you. 15Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!

After a church service, Ole, Lena, and Sven were talking about the pastor's message on cheerful giving. Ole and Lena were telling Sven that they experience no joy in giving. Sven was perplexed by this and asked them how they decided what to give to church. Ole said, "I draw a circle around me and throw my money into the air. Whatever lands in the circle I give to God. Whatever lands outside the circle I keep." Lena said, "I too draw a circle and throw my money into the air. Whatever lands outside the circle I give to God. Whatever lands inside the circle I keep." Sven said, "I see your problem. No wonder you are not cheerful givers. I too throw my money into the air. I yell, 'Catch!' Whatever God keeps is His. Whatever lands on the ground is mine. I am always a cheerful giver!"

Today I want to talk about cheerful giving. Cheerful giving is the giving a Christian does out of the freedom of the gospel. There is no compulsion in cheerful giving. There is no guilt. There is only freedom.

Cheerful giving looks like a fifth grader who heard a missionary speak and decided to save his lunch money for the entire week so that he could give it to the missionaries the following Sunday. It was with joy that he brought his offering to the church.

Lutherans are cheerful givers. We graciously give to all kinds of people and ministries. Timothy Wengert tells a story of a time when he was surprised by the hospitality of his congregation. He writes, "A member of my church was an intern at a poor congregation on the Texas-Mexico border. Hearing that the folks there did not have enough winter clothing, the intern asked the members of my congregation for help. I was skeptical about how the members would respond. I allowed a single, small note in the newsletter and a few halfhearted announcements to be made. I was shocked when my

congregation of 330 members brought in a half-ton of clothing” (Timothy Wengert, *A Formula for Parish Ministry*, p. 101). This is cheerful giving.

I cannot help but think of the members of this congregation who cheerfully give of their time, treasure and talents. The recycling ministry is cheerful giving. The Sunday offering is cheerful giving. Bringing school supplies for kids in third world countries is cheerful giving. We are cheerful givers.

With the recent economic woes, cheerful giving is threatened. All the doomsday comments about the sky falling causes many of us to be frightened. This fear turns cheerful giving into cheerless giving filled with fear and worry. No longer are we free. Instead, we are reluctant. In such times, we need to be reminded of the freedom we have in Christ.

In our reading from II Corinthians, we find the apostle Paul reminding the people to be cheerful givers. He reminds them of the giving the people in Macedonia. In chapter 8:1ff Paul says, “And now, brothers, we want you to know about the grace that God has given the Macedonian churches. Out of the most severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity. For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability. Entirely on their own, they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the saints. And they did not do as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then to us in keeping with God's will” (8:1-5).

Paul then reminds them of their own generosity. “There is no need for me to write to you about this service to the saints. For I know your eagerness to help, and I have been boasting about it to the Macedonians, telling them that since last year you in Achaia were ready to give; and your enthusiasm has stirred most of them to action”

When the time came to receive the collection, Paul urges the Corinthians to finish strong. What is interesting in Paul's message is what he does not say. He does not mention tithing. There is no mention of a good or bad economy. Paul is not telling them to look to Wall Street in order to determine their giving. Paul does not bring up a person to give a testimony on how giving has changed his or her life. He does not shame them. He does none of these things.

Instead, Paul reminds them about farming. II Corinthians 9:6 says, “Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously.” In other words, be generous in your sowing and you will be generous in your reaping. This makes sense. You might remember the parable of the Sower. The sower generously sows seed on pavement, rocky soil, thorny soil, and good soil. He does this because he wants a generous harvest.

Doesn't this seem wasteful to take perfectly good seed and throw it into the ground? Shouldn't you save some of the seed and use it for food?

The farmer knows that God has made seed to be thrown into the ground in order for a harvest to occur. It's death and resurrection. Every spring, summer, and fall the farmer sees God's provision as he reaps a generous harvest. The farmer, more than anyone else, knows that his whole life is dependent on God's generosity. God provides the seed, the soil, the sun, and the rain. All he can do is scatter seed. The rest is God's work.

How many of you remember the children's story called "The Garden," where Toad plants seeds and yells at them to sprout. Frog warns Toad that he has frightened the seeds, and now they will never grow, so Toad tries a variety of tricks to sweet-talk his seeds out of the ground. Finally, Toad falls asleep and the seeds come up all on their own.

The farmer knows this. He knows that his very life is dependent on God. The farmer throws perfectly good seed into the ground because he knows that God provides for him. That is why Paul says in verses 8-10: "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 [all] good work. As it is written: "He has scattered abroad his gifts to the poor; his righteousness endures forever." 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."

Once the harvest comes, the farmer reaps the harvest, pays the bills, sets aside seed for next year, and then shares his abundance. He does not let the excess rot in the ground. He gives it to family and friends. He shares with those in need. He doesn't even think twice about it.

There is a movie called "Sweet Land" that is set in a Norwegian-Lutheran community in Northern Minnesota during the 1920's. It is a great movie. I highly recommend it. In the movie, there is a scene where Olaf (the main character) comes to the aid of his friend whose farm is threatened by foreclosure. Olaf's response puts him at great risk. But it is love for his friend that allows him to give so freely. It is an astonishing moment, full of grace. The courageous act of Olaf changes the hearts of others in the community. It's a moment of redemption.

That is what Paul knows. Verse 11: "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" (9:11). The farmer who has much shares much with those in need.

Doesn't all of this sound familiar? Death and resurrection. Coming to the aid of one in need. Doing this with joy. As much as I am talking about giving, I am really talking about Jesus.

- Jesus is the seed who was buried into the ground. "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains by itself alive; but if it dies, it bears much fruit" (John 11:24).
- Jesus came to the rescue of his neighbor at a great personal cost. "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich" (II Corinthians 8:9).
- Jesus did this cheerfully. "Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God" (Hebrews 12:2).

Jesus is the seed richly sown. Jesus is the generous neighbor. Jesus is the cheerful giver who gives of himself on the cross, in the word, in the waters of baptism, in the Lord's Supper.

Because of Jesus, you no longer have to feel guilty for what you give or fail to give. There is no shame. Christ paid your price! Jesus gave your tithe. He is your offering. You are free. From now on, anything and everything you give is out of abundance.

Be generous. Sow generously. Reap generously. Share generously. Love generously. Volunteer generously. Be generous to one another. Will there be sacrifice involved? Yes. Will there be sweat from hard work? Absolutely. There is not a farmer who does not sweat. But there will also be joy as a great harvest occurs with enough to go around.

Be a cheerful giver. God loves cheerful givers, because God is The Cheerful Giver.

**In Jesus Name,
Amen**