

SERMON FOR JUNE 11, 2023
LIVING GENEROUSLY
TEXT: 2 CORINTHIANS 8:9-15

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 as 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."

In the name of Jesus:

A question that is asked of future men who are to be interviewed for entry into the pastoral is a question that all of us should consider. "Who taught you to be generous?" Generosity is not an inherited trait, it is a learned skill. None of us are generous by nature; in fact we are down right selfish and self centered.

‘ Much to my delight I recently was on the receiving end of someone’s generosity. As I ordered a meal at a local fast food restaurant, I pulled up to the drive through window to pay for my order. The person at the window gave me my food and drink and told me that the person who was in front of

me in the drive through line had already paid for my order. I was thankful for the act of generosity and will seek to practice generosity in the same way to others.

Beth Hughes vowed to do the same. Beth Hughes, a stay-at-home mother in Oklahoma, was about to pay the grocery store cashier for food for her family's Thanksgiving dinner last November when a customer tapped her on the shoulder and said, "Ma'am, I'm going to pay for your groceries." The woman stepped in and swiped her credit card, paying the \$214 grocery bill, and then left. Hughes said she was so shocked that she can't remember if she said thank you. She shared the story on Facebook and said her friends said they were encouraged to do the same thing.

Generosity needs to be received when it is offered. That is what you do when someone offers you something that you need. You graciously accept.

I would like for you to consider for a moment all that God has done for you, all that God has given to you. God has given to you your very life and existence. Everything you have, everything you possess, has been given to you as a gift from God. It is just as Martin Luther writes in his explanation to the First Article of the Apostles' Creed: **"I believe that God created me, along with all creatures. God gave to me: body and soul, eyes, ears and all the other parts of my body, my mind and all my senses and preserves them**

as well. God gives me clothing and shoes, food and drink, house and land, spouse and children, fields, animals, and all I own. Every day God abundantly provides everything I need to nourish this body and life. God protects me against all danger, shields and defends me from all evil. God does all this because of pure, fatherly, and divine goodness and mercy, not because I've earned it or deserved it.” And that is not all, for as we learn in the Second Article Jesus has purchased and won you from sin, Satan, and death, not with silver or gold but with His holy precious blood and innocent suffering and death. And Luther further explains in the Third Article that the Holy Spirit has called you by the Gospel and enlightened you with His gifts. And how should you respond to such generosity on the part of God? By, as Luther says, thanking, praising, serving and obeying Him. But the real question is: “How do you respond to God’s generosity? And how will you respond as you make your pledge for the coming year?

The natural, sinful inclination to God’s generosity is to be greedy and want more, to not be satisfied with what you have. That is what the Ninth and Tenth Commandments are all about, namely, sinfully wanting more and more in your life and not being satisfied with all that God has given to you. Certainly each of us want food, clothing, shelter, to be taken care of, to be loved, to have

our basic needs met. And God indeed does that! He gives more than what we can think of even asking. But instead of thanking Him and living generously toward others, you bitterly complain about what you don't have. God gives you a glass that is overflowing and instead of thanking Him you want another glass! How much is enough? Can there ever be enough? Many times in selfishness you don't think so.

And so when it comes time for the believer to respond to God's generosity, oftentimes you will hear: "Well, here comes another money sermon!" Or, "I can't give more than what I am giving, I need to make certain I have enough." It is a common theme and response, and it is one that God does not accept!

Just note God's response in the book of Haggai. Written after the time of the exile, the Jewish nation returned from captivity to their homeland to rebuild their lives and nation. God had delivered them from trials and tribulations, so how do you think that they thanked God? They didn't. Surprised? You shouldn't be. It is the natural inclination of the sinner, to think of your own needs first and place God second. This lack of thankfulness and lack of generosity to God and His house was not forgotten or lost by God. Haggai showed the problem of focusing on you first and neglecting God's mission. The people in Haggai's time kept looking out for their own interest,

and kept putting off the rebuilding of the Temple. They made sure that they got theirs first, and then God would get the leftovers. God saw what was going on, and so God said: ""³ Then the word of the Lord came by the hand of Haggai the prophet,⁴ "Is it a time for you yourselves to dwell in your paneled houses, while this house lies in ruins?"⁵ Now, therefore, thus says the Lord of hosts: Consider your ways.⁶ You have sown much, and harvested little. You eat, but you never have enough; you drink, but you never have your fill. You clothe yourselves, but no one is warm. And he who earns wages does so to put them into a bag with holes.⁷ "Thus says the Lord of hosts: Consider your ways.⁹ You looked for much, and behold, it came to little. And when you brought it home, I blew it away. Why? Declares the Lord of hosts"

Why? Have you ever wondered why you can't make ends meet, why you bring your paycheck home and it seems so little? God desires your first fruits, not your leftovers! Many despise God and His gifts when you give back to God a pittance of what He gives to you! Listen to God speak through prophet Malachi who says: "A son honors his father, and a servant his master. If then I am a father, where is my honor? If I am a master, where is my fear? You say how have we despised your name? By offering to God blind animals in sacrifice, when you offer lame and sick offerings, isn't that evil?" (Malachi 1: 6-8).

God saw through this charade. For God says: “If you will not listen, if you will not take to heart to give honor to My name, then I, the Lord will send the curse upon you and I will curse your blessings.” God is not man, and He is not to be despised. By not returning to God a first fruit offering, you thereby rob God. Listen to Malachi once again: ““For I the Lord do not change; therefore you, O children of Jacob, are not consumed. ⁷ From the days of your fathers you have turned aside from my statutes and have not kept them. Return to me, and I will return to you, says the Lord of hosts. But you say, ‘How shall we return?’ ⁸ Will man rob God? Yet you are robbing me. But you say, ‘How have we robbed you?’ In your tithes and contributions. ⁹ You are cursed with a curse, for you are robbing me, the whole nation of you. ¹⁰ Bring the full tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. And thereby put me to the test, says the Lord of hosts, if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you a blessing until there is no more need.” (Malachi 3: 6-10).

What are you to do? Repent! Change your ways! For God says that if you confess your sins He is faithful and just and will forgive you your sins and cleanse you from all unrighteousness. God has done this by sending His one and only Son, Jesus, who was cursed by God in your place, suffering God’s wrath and damnation so that you would be forgiven. And you are! God has

washed your sins away in the flood of your Baptismal waters, Jesus comes again to you in, with and under the bread and wine to forgive and strengthen you. So how will you respond?

Consider what God has done for you in Jesus Christ. “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.” And you are! God has blessed you immensely! So give to the Lord, not what you don’t have, but give a portion, a first fruit, and a tithe back to the Lord for He is good to you! God will continue to provide for your needs. Hasn’t He done so to this point in your life?

So seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness! Store up for yourself treasures in heaven, that moth and rust will not destroy. Respond with generosity toward God! Give thanks to the Lord for He is good, and His mercy endures forever!

Amen