

GOD'S GRACE OF GIVING

Sermon for the 6th Sunday after Pentecost, 2018

2 Corinthians 8:1-9

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be wit you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is 2 Corinthians 8:1-9, which we heard read as part of our Second Reading before: ¹ **Fellow-Christians, we make known to you the grace that God has bestowed on the churches of Macedonia.** ² **While they were severely tested by trouble, their overflowing joy and their deep poverty overflowed to produce their rich generosity.** ³ **For I testify that they were freely willing, according to their ability and beyond their ability.** ⁴ **They urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this ministry to God's holy people.** ⁵ **They did not do as we expected but through the will of God first gave themselves to the Lord and to us.** ⁶ **This has led us to urge Titus to complete among you this work of kindness also, in the same way as he had earlier begun it.** ⁷ **As you abound in everything, in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in all eagerness and in your love for us, see that you abound in this work of kindness also!** ⁸ **I do not say this as a command but am using the eagerness of others to test how genuine your love is.** ⁹ **For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, although He was rich, yet because of you He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich...**

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth, Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

The concept of "grace" is one of the most important in Scripture. It deals directly with the nature of God, our hope of salvation, and our ability to live our Christian lives. The Bible assures us that we are saved "*by grace... through faith,*" (Ephesians 2:8). We are not saved by our own good works,

nor could we be, for we have all sinned against God and find ourselves by nature condemned by His Law.¹ Rather, our salvation is a gift from God, given to us solely in view of His divine love and mercy. Therefore, grace is rightly defined as “God’s undeserved love.” Grace, however, is not simply an *attitude* of God, but rather it is *part of His very essence*. Our God is gracious, even as He is just, all-powerful, and all-knowing. The writer to the Hebrews urges us to “*come boldly to the throne of (God’s) grace,*” (4:16). When we, through the Spirit’s work come to faith in Jesus Christ, we enter a state of grace which means that all our sins have been forgiven by the atoning work of Jesus Christ, we are at peace with God, and we rejoice in the hope of sharing God’s glory throughout eternity in heaven.²

There is another aspect of grace, however, which may not at times receive the attention it deserves. That aspect of grace deals with our Christians lives and is the special grace, or what we might call the privileged ability given by God to Christians to fulfil their callings in this life as God’s children. For instance, in his Letter to the Romans the apostle Paul speaks of the “*grace given*” to him by God, so that he should be a minister of Jesus Christ (Romans 15:15). God by grace gave grace to Paul which enabled him to serve in the public ministry as a missionary and apostle. In our text today Paul speaks to us of the grace of giving - the subject we want to consider today. To be able to give with generosity and confident joy is a gift. It involves a special ability, which only the Spirit of God can provide. Man possessed this grace of giving, which is part of the very image of God, at the time of creation, but lost that grace when sin entered the world. Adam and Eve, who had been blessed with every possible blessing, assumed when they were tempted that God had deprived them of something and so they took that which was forbidden. Man has continued to take - uncertain of his standing with God, depending upon himself, and, giving way to his selfish and covetous desires, he takes, and takes thinking that if only he can take enough he will be secure and satisfied. But the

¹ Romans 3:20, 23

² Romans 5:1-2

things of this world do not bring security or lasting satisfaction. No, true security is found in a *solid faith relationship with Jesus Christ* and true satisfaction can only be achieved as a result of that faith relationship. Such a relationship paves the way for every believing child of God to receive the gift of the grace of giving, a grace of giving as illustrated by Jesus Christ; a grace of giving emulated by the Macedonians; and a grace of giving encouraged by the apostle Paul.

The grace of giving has been illustrated by Jesus Christ! Paul says, ⁹ **For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, although He was rich, yet because of you He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich.**”

As the Son of God grace is part of the essence of our Saviour. He possesses a love for us like His Father’s. It is a love that we do not deserve, but from which we benefit so greatly, and that benefit is emphasised here. Jesus, who as true God sat on heaven’s throne surrounded by the praises of hosts of angels - the possessor of all things, gave up the full acknowledgement of His glory and use of His possessions to become one of us and experience the trials and rejection of life in this sin-filled world. Let us be clear that when Jesus was born of the Mary, it was *not* the fact that He became man that made Him poor. He remains true man even today but lives now as the God-Man in an exalted state. Rather, as Paul explained to the Philippians, “*Christ Jesus... emptied Himself, took on the form of a slave... He humbled Himself, becoming obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross,*” (2:5b, 7a, 8b). Jesus became poor in that He gave up that which He rightfully possessed in order to serve us. Jesus was not born in a gleaming palace in Rome, but rather was born in a gloomy stable in Bethlehem. Jesus was not raised in a gated community within the capital city of Jerusalem, but in a small house in the village of Nazareth. He did not own a beach side cottage on the Mediterranean, but rather as He explained to a potential follower, “*The Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head,*” (Matthew 8:20). He did not wear expensive silks or have a closet full of clothes, but rather the soldiers drew lots to divide the only clothes

He had just hours before His death. Yes, the Son of God gave up everything - even His relationship with His Father and His very own life, in order that we who by nature are poverty stricken spiritually might become rich.

By nature, every one of us are spiritually poor, and sadly, there are many people who do not recognise this fact. In fact, some Christians become so charmed by this world that they too can forget this fact. In the Book of Revelation, in his vision, John heard Jesus warn the Laodicean Christians, “... *you are saying: ‘I am rich, and have become wealthy, and have need of nothing,’ and you do not know that you are miserable, pitiful, poor, blind, and naked,*” (3:17). Sin by nature separates man from God. Sin can blind eyes to the truth. Yes, it is true, that many people seem to get along just fine without God in this world. They enjoy themselves and appear to have many things, but their enjoyment and their things are temporal. This life is all too brief and as the writer to the Hebrews states, “*It is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment!*” (Hebrews 9:27)

Jesus gave Himself for us in order to give us the gift of eternal life. Why did He do it? The answer is not found in us, but rather is His grace - His love for us, which we did not deserve. Jesus was able and willing to give Himself for us for a number of reasons, all of which are important to understand if we are to receive the grace of giving. Jesus knew who He was - the very Son of God who possessed all things, but who was not possessed by those things. Jesus’ greatest desire was to fulfil the “*will of the Father who sent*” Him (cf. John 5:30). Jesus loved us and in spite of our sins was determined to fulfil His Father’s plan of redemption so that we would have life. Jesus kept His eyes on the prize and knew that when His work was done He would be received into glory! Yes, the grace of giving was illustrated by Jesus Christ!

The grace of giving has also been emulated by the Macedonians.

Our entire text revolves around a natural calamity - a famine in the land of Palestine. The famine had come to that region and left many without food or the necessary resources to purchase food and the other necessities

of life. The apostle Paul, upon hearing of this calamity, immediately called upon the Christians of Greece and Asia Minor to help their fellow Christians in Judea. As is the case today, different groups of Christians vary in their ability to respond to emergencies. Some have been blessed with considerable assets, while the assets of others are quite limited. What proves so interesting and is therefore so instructive for us today is the example of the Macedonian Christians. They, in spite of their limitations, had been blessed with the grace of giving. Paul writes, “¹ **Fellow-Christians, we make known to you the grace that God has bestowed on the churches of Macedonia.** ² **While they were severely tested by trouble, their overflowing joy and their deep poverty overflowed to produce their rich generosity.** ³ **For I testify that they were freely willing, according to their ability and beyond their ability.** ⁴ **They urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this ministry to God’s holy people.** ⁵ **They did not do as we expected but through the will of God first gave themselves to the Lord and to us.”**

Note two things about this group of believers. First of all, this group of believers found great joy in giving generously to help others in spite of great personal trials and in spite of great poverty. These individuals were not wealthy individuals simply giving of their surplus. They were individuals in “**deep poverty**,” which suggests that their situation was at least as dire if not more dire than those people they were seeking to help. Secondly, these individuals were moved with *great urgency*, freely willing to give more than anyone thought they were able to give.

What motivated these Macedonian Christians to be such givers? It was indeed a gift of God’s grace, but a gift based upon something prerequisite and essential. Paul writes, “⁵ **They did not do as we expected but through the will of God first gave themselves to the Lord and to us.”**

The Macedonian Christians knew who they were. By God’s grace they had been redeemed. They belonged to God and wanted to draw near to Him. They gave themselves to their God and desired, as had their Saviour Himself, to do nothing other than to fulfil the will of God. They saw their

brethren in Palestine in terms of precious souls bought by the blood of Christ... as members of the same body of Christ and destined to be united with them in Christ throughout all of eternity. The key to the grace of giving is such an understanding, for when I know that I am a child of God destined to spend eternity with God in view of the redemptive work of Christ, then I am prepared to dedicate myself to God and give as God. The grace of giving was indeed illustrated by Jesus Christ and emulated by the Macedonians!

Finally, a grace of giving was encouraged by the apostle Paul.

The Corinthian congregation had been encouraged by Paul to join the other Christians of Greece and Asia Minor is taking up a collection for the believers in Palestine. The Corinthians Christians, unlike those in Macedonia, had been blessed in many ways, including financially. Paul urged Titus, his colleague and special representative to the Corinthians to **“complete among you this work of kindness”** among the Corinthians Christians as well. He pointed out that they **“abound(ed) in everything.”** They had a great and knowledgeable faith, were gifted in sharing that faith, and were blessed with good and loving hearts. Yet having many gifts does not necessarily lead to an ability to give with both joy and generosity. That requires a gift of grace.

It is no secret to anyone who regularly reads his or her Bible that the Corinthian congregation, in spite of its many blessings, was a troubled congregation. 1 Corinthians is a catalogue of sins, most of which bespeak the need for the grace of giving. Jealousy, pride, and selfishness caused deep divisions within the congregation and hampered its witness to the unbelieving world around it. The solution for the Corinthians, according to Paul, was to repent of their sins and keep their eyes on Jesus Christ. He was the Head of the Church, and so therefore the Corinthians were not to divide themselves in support of one pastor over against another. He was the giver of all talents and abilities, so use them to honour Him as opposed to exalting self. He was the giver of materials wealth, and so use that wealth to uplift rather than to embarrass those who had little. In connection with

this project - consider Christ who gave so much, so that we might inherit what will prove to be everything!

Dear friends, as we consider ourselves and our own congregations, it will do little good to compare ourselves either to the Macedonians or the Corinthians, but it will profit us greatly to learn from their examples. Whether we are individually rich or poor, our goal should always be to draw closer to our God as His dear children. Let us remember the grace and mercy of our God in sending Jesus. Let us repent of our sins and pray that God would remove our selfish natures. Let us to place a high priority on our spiritual needs. Let us remember that is it more blessed to give than to receive. Let us pray for God's grace of giving! Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

PRAYER FOR THE SIXTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Lord of all power and grace, since Your eyes watch over the righteous and Your ears listen to their cries, hear our prayers as we come before You in gratitude and praise for all Your mercies.

We remember our great sinfulness before You, O Lord, and confess it with repentant hearts. Do not treat us as we deserve, but forgive us because of Your limitless love, that we may experience anew the joy of Your salvation and always live to Your praise.

We thank You for the daily miracles of Your care and love. Help us to realise always that You open Your hand and satisfy the needs of all Your creation and fill our lives with everything good, and make us thankful people.

We praise You especially for the gift of Your Son Jesus Christ, whom You have sent to be the Saviour of the world. Grant that we may believe in Him with all our hearts, honour Him as our Lord, and live under Him in the kingdom He has established. Help us to obey His words eagerly, to love Him truly, and to serve Him joyfully.

Continue to enlighten our lives by Your Holy Spirit, so that they may produce the abundant fruits of righteousness. Enable us to grow in

knowledge of Your truth, in self-control in our lives. Give us a firm faith, pious minds, pure hearts, affection and sympathy for all our fellow-Christians, and love for all people.

Raise up pastors who will be true fishers of men. Help all Your people to put aside human opinions and selfish concerns, and to follow Your Son wherever He leads them. Give unity of spirit to Your people. Uphold those Christians who are suffering for the sake of their faith; and give them strength and courage.

We pray for the nations of the earth. Put down tyranny and terrorism. Raise up leaders who acknowledge You and Your will. Bless our country Australia. Lead its people pursue all that is good, and to put aside all that is evil. Frustrate the designs of those who want to promote murder through abortion and euthanasia. Look with mercy upon the land and send weather appropriate to our needs.

Hear the cry of the suffering. Help them in body and spirit, and save them for Your mercy's sake. And, as we are only pilgrims in this world, guide and keep us, and bring us all at last to our heavenly home.

Receive these prayers, which we offer in the name of the author of life, Jesus Christ, who, together with You and the Holy Spirit, lives and reigns, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

The Sixth Sunday after Pentecost

Lamentations 3:22-33

²² It is because of the LORD's mercies that we have not been completely cut off. For His compassion has not come to an end.

²³ It is new every morning. Your faithfulness is great.

²⁴ I have been saying to myself, "The LORD is my portion.

Therefore, I shall put my hope in Him."

²⁵ The LORD is good to those who wait for Him, to the person who seeks Him.

²⁶ It is good that one hopes, even in silence, for the salvation of the LORD.

²⁷ It is good for a person to carry a yoke while he is young.

²⁸ He should sit alone and keep silent. For the LORD has laid it on him.

²⁹ He should put his mouth in the dust. Perhaps there is hope.

³⁰ He should offer his cheek to the one who strikes him and receive plenty of insults.

³¹ For the Lord will not reject for ever.

³² However, if He has caused grief, He will show compassion, because His mercies are very great.

³³ For He has not taken pleasure in tormenting human beings or in oppressing them.

2 Corinthians 8:1-9, 13-15

¹ Fellow-Christians, we make known to you the grace that God has bestowed on the churches of Macedonia. ² While they were severely tested by trouble, their overflowing joy and their deep poverty overflowed to produce their rich generosity. ³ For I testify that they were freely willing, according to their ability and beyond their ability. ⁴ They urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this ministry to God's holy

people. ⁵ They did not do as we expected but through the will of God first gave themselves to the Lord and to us. ⁶ This has led us to urge Titus to complete among you this work of kindness also, in the same way as he had earlier begun it. ⁷ As you abound in everything, in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in all eagerness and in your love for us, see that you abound in this work of kindness also! ⁸ I do not say this as a command but am using the eagerness of others to test how genuine your love is. ⁹ For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, although He was rich, yet because of you He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich...

¹³ We do not desire others to have relief and you to have hardship but equality. ¹⁴ At the present time, your plenty will supply what they need, that their plenty may also supply what you need, that there may be equality, ¹⁵ as Scripture has said: "Anyone who gathered much did not have too much, and anyone who gathered little did not have too little."

Mark 5:21-43

²¹ After Jesus had crossed over again in the boat to the other side of the lake, a large crowd gathered around Him while He was beside the lake. ²² Then one of the synagogue rulers, named Jairus, came. When he saw Jesus, he fell at His feet. ²³ He pleaded earnestly with Jesus: “My little daughter is at the point of death. Come and lay Your hands on her that she may be saved and live!”

²⁴ Jesus went with him. A large crowd was following Him and pressing around Him.

²⁵ There was a woman who had had a flow of blood for twelve years. ²⁶ She had suffered much under the care of many doctors and had spent all that she had. She had not been helped at all but instead had become worse. ²⁷ Since she had heard about Jesus, she came from behind in the crowd and touched His garment. ²⁸ For she said, “If I only touch His clothes, I shall be made well.”

²⁹ Immediately the source of her haemorrhage dried up, and she was aware in her body that she

had been healed from her affliction. ³⁰ At once Jesus realised in Himself that power had gone out from Him. He turned around in the crowd and kept asking, “Who has touched My clothes?”

³¹ His disciples kept saying to Him, “You see how the crowd is pressing around You, yet You ask, ‘Who has touched Me?’”

³² However, He kept looking around to see the woman who had done this. ³³ The woman, in fear and trembling, because she knew what had happened to her, came and fell before Him and told Him the whole truth.

³⁴ He told her, “Daughter, your faith has made you well. Go in peace! Be healed from your affliction!”

³⁵ While He was still speaking, some men came from the ruler of the synagogue and said, “Your daughter has died. Why do you trouble the Teacher any further?”

³⁶ Jesus disregarded the message that they were telling and told the ruler of the synagogue, “Stop being afraid! Only believe!”

³⁷ He did not allow anyone to go with Him except Peter, James and John, the brother of James. ³⁸ When they came to the home of the ruler of the synagogue, Jesus saw a noisy crowd, with people weeping and wailing loudly. ³⁹ When He had gone inside, He asked them, “Why do you go on making a commotion and weeping? The child is not dead but asleep.”

⁴⁰ They began to laugh at Him. However, He put them all outside, took with Him the child’s father and mother and those who were with Him and went in to where the child was. ⁴¹ He took the child’s hand and said to her, “Talitha, koum!” which means, “Little girl, I tell you, get up!”

⁴² Immediately the girl stood up and walked around (she was twelve years old). At once they were completely astonished. ⁴³ Jesus gave them strict orders that no one should find out about this and told them that something should be given to her to eat.