

## WELCOME 12<sup>th</sup> September 2021 – 16 Pentecost '21 B

2 Corinthians 8:1-15

**Welcome!** It's great to be together. As has become our custom there are Group Study & Discussion resources for you to use *over the course of the week*. As God leads you into the fullness of His word/work in your life he will then introduce you to someone who needs to hear the good news from you. Also... somewhere here today you may feel a nudge - tap - tug. Don't ignore it! That's probably the Holy Spirit prompting you some way. Let's talk about that after worship.

**As we move into this week...** When the going gets tough, Australians step up! That's the finding of a survey conducted to ascertain the impact of crisis on our general inclination to give. When a crisis is evident...drought, bushfire, flood...folks will often go above & beyond to give toward relieving the crunch for someone else. But what about a prolonged widespread time of distress...like now...the unceasing pandemic response...when things get tight/uncertain & giving seems unwise or impossible?

That's what makes the Macedonian church even more inspiring. They were swamped w/ tough times...*"many troubles"* & *"very poor."* They had nothing to spare. Yet, they gave generously, *"not only what they could afford, but far more."* What **inspires** *"generous generosity"* when one starts with so little?

Authentic Generosity is an expression of grace that flows from the blessings we have received. Authentic Generosity comes from a heart that's been embraced by the Father's love in Jesus & equipped by the Spirit to support the work of God's people in ever-expanding ways.

**You** *know the generous grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.  
Though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor,  
so that by his poverty he could make you rich.*

Generosity is not just about finances, but it **IS** about finances...It is about our time, our energies, our wisdom, our skills & gifts...most importantly it's about our hearts.

In the fragile temporary abundance of this life, we live toward an assured eternity w/ the Father in the arms of His Son. Authentic Generosity is how we embody the self-giving of Jesus in all we do; & becoming authentically generous is a joyful transformation of our hearts/lives that never ends.

We'll experience & share that together. Let's pray...then we'll get stuck into it.

## PRAYER OF THE DAY:

*Almighty & always-gracious God, our salvation depends upon you & you alone. So set us free from worldly things & worldly worries so we can truly hear & obey your Word. Release us from our anxious moments & fear-bound living so that by your Spirit we discern & obey your will for us. Let our lives be lived to offer witness to your saving power & redeeming love; through our Lord Jesus Christ Amen.*

Now let's hear God's Word...

## **FAITH CHAT:**

- How do you feel when you hear/say each of these words:

SPEND

SAVE

GIVE

*What emotions do you experience...*

*While you reflect on that a bit...let's hear & worship along with Living Hope*

## 16 Pentecost – '21 B – AUTHENTIC GENEROSITY: INSPIRATION FOR GENEROSITY

Good2Give, is a “not-for-profit platform for charitable giving.” They help corporations & individuals make charitable giving easy straightforward & effective: “As an individual, giving makes us feel good.” There’s “science” to back that up...A number of studies show the very act of giving builds one’s sense of belonging, meaning & helps grow wider generosity in our society.

That’s probably true in general...but G2G never met Frank. Frank was for a time a member of the first church I served in Sth Tx. He & his brother (Dave) & their families had been part of that congregation for generations. Both were highly educated respected professionals in the community. Both owned their own businesses & were people of influence in the town & congregation.

But Frank hated any conversation about giving...time talent treasure he didn’t want to know. Every couple of years he would change churches because there would be a budget to pass a building project to fund a youth worker to hire... & he’d shift from one Lutheran church to the other. Even the thought of giving didn’t seem to make Frank “feel good.” Nothing any pastor said would inspire him toward generosity. He once told the Sr pastor & me: “If I won the lottery...” He’d already won life’s lottery, but he was sure he’d need more <sup>b</sup>/<sub>4</sub> he could even think generously.

Every time I read **2 Cor 8**...I remember Frank...because the Macedonians seem so different. **Now** I want you to know, dear brothers & sisters, what God in his kindness (God’s grace) has done through the churches in Macedonia. They are being tested by many troubles (severe trial), & they are very poor (extreme poverty). But they are also filled with abundant joy, which has overflowed in rich generosity. (generous generosity) For I can testify they gave not only what they could afford, but far more. And they did it of their own free will. They begged us again & again for the privilege of sharing in the gift for the believers in Jerusalem. They even did more than we had hoped, for their first action was to give themselves to the Lord & (then) to us, just as God wanted them to do.

What inspires energizes that kind of behaviour? What could motivate a group of followers of Jesus to go over the top in giving toward a need they’ll never see met <sup>w</sup>/ <sub>their own eyes</sub> (in Jerusalem) & from which they will derive no benefit? *No ROI*

Well...some observations & them some applications: 1<sup>st</sup> – I’ve said it a bunch: (John Piper) **Grace** is not only pardon it is also power and Generosity is an expression of grace in action. Grace does not just take care of my sin it is how the Holy Spirit operates in my life to make me more like Jesus & less like my old sinner self who keeps hanging on trying to get me to look after me/mine. **Now** I want you to know, dear brothers & sisters, what God in his kindness (God’s grace) has done through the churches in Macedonia.

The church of Jesus Christ lives by grace or dies <sup>w</sup>/<sub>o</sub> it. Churches do not thrive on duty - obligation - guilt - tradition - history - inertia or the hard work of the pastor or leaders or one or two hardworking saints...If there is to be any blessing any harvest any growth any future trajectory in among through LWF, it will be all of grace **OR** it will not be of God. Not just past grace that we give thanks for & remember, but day-by-day on-going out-pourings of grace for every need season circumstance situation Grace lived in our lives: grace that touches works serves blesses listens visits helps cares gives Grace lived out in our lives like the Macedonians.

2<sup>nd</sup> – vs 2 - Grace does not make you bullet-proof...**Grace** does not exempt you from hardship. **They** are being tested by many troubles (severe trial), & they are very poor (extreme poverty). But they are also filled with abundant joy, which has overflowed in rich generosity. (generous generosity) Paul showed up in Macedonia & preached Jesus crucified/risen/ruling over all things in love & the Spirit drew a bunch of them to faith. They were baptized, started praying & working together <sup>w</sup>/<sub>whatever Scriptures they could get their hands on</sub> & worshipping & sharing their experience of Christ <sup>w</sup>/<sub>other people</sub>...loved each other cared for each other & life got harder not easier. **WHAT?!?!**

Sometimes you start trusting Jesus <sup>w</sup>/<sub>your life</sub> & you get hammered by the devil & all sorts of other stuff. They were persecuted for their faith. Some families blew up when <sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> started following Jesus & other <sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> didn’t. Some folks had to quit jobs ‘cos they couldn’t do what they used to do to earn a living. Jesus had rearranged their ethics morals & ambitions. Not only has the grace of God brought more affliction, but it has not removed poverty.

**BUT they are also filled with abundant joy**...Joy is not rooted in your circumstance but in your salvation. Joy lives in the soil of grace not in an idyllic utopia of unicorns & big rock candy mountain. Joy is that overwhelming sense of Christ at work in you no matter what else is in play in your life. Joy is possible in the midst of grief - pain - frustration - lockdowns that don’t work - confusion/distress/sadness unemployment surgery chemo divorce you didn’t want...death you didn’t expect...

2 Cor 4:8ff Paul says **We** are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed...” Why? How? Joy...because Jesus is raised & will raise us & take us home to the Father where all the temporary fleeting hurts/hang-ups of this world will be gone forever & only love & joy in the Father’s presence last eternally. Instead of moaning groaning & whinging, they are overflowing <sup>w</sup>/<sub>abundant joy</sub>. Their troubles are “many,” affliction is “severe,” poverty is “extreme” but their joy is “abundant.”

**JOY IS GRACE LIVED AT FULL VOLUME!**

3<sup>rd</sup> – **Grace** at work through joy creates a counter-intuitive calculus - **many** troubles (*severe trial*) + *very poor* (*extreme poverty*) + *abundant joy* = *generous generosity*. I was never much good at math but that right there is a mad algorithm. Most of us do this math: **My** income – (My needs + My wants + My debt + My long-term plan) = ? From what's leftover I can give to church/charity. That's std worldly Western math. Most of us know if the income side of the equation is smaller than the need/want/dream/wishcast side... then you work for the gov't. Deficit spending & debt. That's how 21<sup>st</sup> Century Western gov'ts function. If they had to pay all their bills every month they'd jump off the Harbor Bridge.

You & I do better math than most gov'ts. We tend to spend less than we make. But the Macedonians did math even better. **For** *I can testify they gave not only what they could afford, but far more. And they did it of their own free will. They begged us again & again for the privilege of sharing in the gift for the believers in Jerusalem.* The Macedonian Xns live w/ the assumption that the reason they've heard the gospel...purpose for being made children of God...their mission on this earth from baptism to glory is to prove demonstrate show to the non-Xn world the love grace goodness & power of God at work in their lives by any means necessary. BAMN means \$\$...there is a need in Jerusalem & the Macedonians are tripping over each other to get to the offering sack.

So...they live/give out on the edge of what most of us would say is reasonable. Their giving was radical risky...voluntary...no set std/coercion...excessive & because of the joy they found in Jesus Christ they couldn't be held back; *begged for the privilege* of allowing the gospel to take control of their lives & deepen their trust in the Father's ability to provide for them *"pressed down shaken together running over & dumped into your lap."* – *Lk 6:38* Wouldn't it be awesome if we got to the offering part of worship on some Sunday & the Treasurer/ST Chair stood up & said, "Ummm... We're not taking an offering today. Y'all have exceeded our expectation. We have more \$\$\$ than we know how to spend at the moment & if you don't cut that out we're going to have to restrain you." Ex 36:6 says that actually happened...Acts 4:34 hints @ the same thing. That's Macedonian math...Paul says we should give it a go. How do you do that?

**"...their first** action was to give themselves to the Lord & (then) to us, just as God wanted them to do." I am not my own, I have been bought w/ a price. I belong to God. But I must affirm that daily...sometimes a bunch of times daily because I forget. My old sinful self desperately wants to be in control & he's a tough tenacious scoundrel. Let's say it. Nothing of significance takes place in your life, no change, transformation, healing, recovery, rest, breakthrough, harvest, fruit, joy...rat on a wheel w/ no escape & no progress...as long as you're telling Jesus how to make your life come out right. As long as you're smarter know more can find the loopholes...nothing. *Apart from me you can do nothing – Jn 15:5*

You have been baptized into Christ. You're dead/raised w/ him so that he lives through you. (Rom 6:4/Gal 2:20) but you also are baptized into Christ's body here on earth his church. We now are servants together for the sake of the world seeing Christ & his Kingdom at work in us. **Generosity** is an extension of the grace that has saved you & the love that has conquered you. verse 7 – 8 - 9

**Since** *you excel in so many ways—in your faith, your gifted speakers, your knowledge, your enthusiasm, & your love from us — I want you to excel also in this gracious act of giving.* Everything good in our life is a result of God's grace at work in us & anything good we do is a result of God's grace working through us as a child of God...So...since God has worked & is working to transform you into the likeness of Christ you may as well let him at your \$\$\$ & let The Father make your giving an extension of his grace already moving you toward Christlikeness. Luther 3 conversions head – heart - wallet

**I am** *not commanding you to do this. But I am testing how genuine your love is by comparing it with the eagerness of the other churches.* Love is an action not an idea. Love is extravagant – passionate – unrestrained...if God's love has seized your wallet it'll empty itself for Christ's sake the way Jesus emptied himself for you. **You** *know the generous grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. Though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that by his poverty he could make you rich.* You cannot outgive God There is no better proof than the fact that Jesus Christ gave up his heavenly existence to assume an earthly state...from heavenly glory surrounded by angels to a criminal's execution surrounded by jeering mobs so we might go from wrath to redeemed. If you follow the example of Jesus you'll be generously generous.

Authentic Generosity is an expression of grace that flows from the blessings we have received. Authentic Generosity comes from a heart that's been embraced by the Father's love in Jesus & equipped by the Spirit to support the work of God's people in ever-expanding ways. **Take it home...** Knowing the abundant generosity of the Father towards you; how will you grow in the grace of giving over the next month...

*If you need wisdom, ask our generous God, & he will give it to you. He will not rebuke you for asking. - Jas 1:5*

*"For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. - John 3:16*

*Since he did not spare even his own Son but gave him up for us all, won't he also give us everything else? - Rom 8:32*

*So if you sinful people know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give good gifts to those who ask him! - Mt 7:11*

30 secs...I'll pray for us to close