

WELCOME 26th September 2021 – 18 Pentecost '21 B

2 Corinthians 9:6-15

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. Seating w/ care...

As we move into this week... The 4WD "all-terrain" vehicle...It has become **THE CAR** of the pandemic. 4 of the top 5 "searched for" vehicles are in that category. If you have a good one for sale; 2nd-hand prices are up 30%. Designed to be taken off road, over obstacles & through terrain conventional vehicles can't manage; they give traction when other transport falters. They move when everything else stops.

Generosity is just like that. It creates momentum, traction, forward progress when everything else wants to slow you down...drag you back, keep you where it seems safe secure stable...we call that...stuck.

Paul gives the Corinthian church the keys to the 4WD of discipleship: **Generosity**. It's not an owner's manual of guidelines, rules & tips, but the power of God who enlists us in his work of transforming hearts & lives by the abundant gift of Jesus Christ working through us.

Paul knows: **God's** abundance **TO** us is only limited by his abundance **THROUGH** us. As we open our hands & hearts more widely more freely & more generously we find the Father refilling our lives to oversupply in joy praise thanksgiving & glory...**AND** the blessings in our hands multiply for even more...The grace of generosity taps the gushing spring of the Father's delight in blessing his children.

God is able to bless you abundantly, so that in **ALL** things at **ALL** times, having **ALL** that you need, you will abound in every good work..

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.

Let's share Psalm 65...

FAITH CHAT:

1. What would happen if no one ever gave generously?
2. What do you think it means to be a *cheerful* giver? How does that happen in someone?

18 Pentecost – '21 B – AUTHENTIC GENEROSITY: MULTIPLICATION OF GENEROSITY

Danny is in the early stages of planting a church in Western Sydney. He's part of a PD of planters/developers/re-developers I've hung out w/ @ various events over the years. He's from a Pentecostal background & as we were wrapping up this week he asked if he could speak prophetically for a minute. **The Zoom squares** all said "Sure." He's been praying for us & trying to discern where each fit in Paul's "gifts Christ gave to the church" **Eph 4:11-13** 5-fold gifting of Apostle Prophet Evangelist Shepherd Teacher

He pretty well nailed it as he went around the "room." He got to the last guy & I was sitting back watching the faces...He said, "You're the hardest...I get a sense you're the purest Teacher among us...Right now that's where you're operating & from what I know you're spot on...but the word I kept hearing beyond that wasn't Teacher but **Trapped**..." The little faces all went bug-eyed. Danny doesn't know this guy...he kept on..."You want to live the apostolic role...visionary, leader of leaders out on the horizon/fringe & you should because that's your true gifting. For whatever reason you're trapped in the teacher space & although you do it well...I sense you really ought to be telling people to get on w/ the ministry right before them...pull up their socks & act like the church out there." Of course I could be wrong...weigh all things hold fast to the good. 1 Thess 5:21

It was weird...not because he was calling this pastor into a greater fullness in using his God-given gifts but because from my little screen it looked like everyone there identified w/ that word "trapped." It looked to me like the pastors were all hearing Paul say to Timothy **This is why I remind you to fan into flames the spiritual gift God gave you when I laid my hands on you. For God has not given us a spirit of fear & timidity, but of power, love, & self-discipline.** – 2 Tim 1:6-7 I think we all heard the word "trapped" & thought, "Yeah...me too. I want out of that." Not just pastors I reckon...

Trapped like anyone forced to get vaccinated just to keep their jobs, even though they'd rather not...or at least not under compulsion. Just like churches are hearing we'll be told to screen at the door...Just like anyone who's pushed back a wedding or a baptism...or who has a loved one at the end of their life but isn't going to get to be there for the last hours or maybe even the funeral. Or whose business/job is hanging on but uncertain because the road ahead is unmapped despite all the political-medico "roadmaps" we keep hearing about. **This is just how it is** means "I'm trapped" & not able to decide for myself what I need to do next/what's best.

Paul understands uncertainty/boxed in...Acts 16 he & Silas are "prevented by the Holy Spirit" from going into Asia Minor 2x. Only a vision of a Macedonian asking Paul to "come over & help us" makes the way clear. Paul understands being stuck/trapped. Nights in jail or adrift at sea...at the mercy of forces larger than you. He knows.

Paul also knows the way out of stuck...the 4WD of discipleship. **Generosity**. Giving more of yourself to the work of Christ breaks that logjam. Giving more of yourself to the work of Christ uncorks the bottle. Giving more of yourself to the work of Christ creates momentum, traction, forward progress excitement when everything else wants to slow you down keep you spinning your wheels. **Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, & whoever sows generously will also reap generously.** I don't know much about farming but I know that. You can't feed your family off of one row. No one plants a crop, starts a business, gets married, or plants a church anticipating failure. Every venture we begin, from the smallest seed to the largest financial or personal investment, we start assuming we're going to be in it for the long haul. We assume we aim for a bountiful result. None of us starts something expecting disaster. Wedding vows are "I do" not "I guess."

Earlier Paul used Macedonian math as an example...**They are being tested** by many troubles, & they are very poor. But they are also filled with abundant joy, which has overflowed in rich 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. 2 Cor 8:1-3

NB Paul's point...The emphasis is upon the heart of the sower, **NOT** the need to be met **OR** the promise of harvest to be received. sparingly vs generously - joy in Christ greater than persecution on top of poverty. The **Macedonians** are more excited about seeing God stretch their faith & their abounding confidence in His capacity to meet their needs than anything else. "They did more...1st to God then us." Sure...there's a need, but Biblically, generosity is not about making sure a debt's paid or the balance is black ink not red...Our focus is not the bank account but our Father the Banker who wants us to experience & trust his abundantly providing goodness.

Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not **reluctantly** or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. vs 7...God seeks deliberate cheerful hearts. The word there *reluctant* is a word that is also used in NT to indicate grief, remorse, & sadness. If you part with your God-given resources like you're at your best friend's funeral...you've messed it up. In fact there are 2 ways to mess up. 1. joyless but generous. 2. joyful but stingy.

God doesn't want us giving out of guilt/pressure or simply to get the balance sheet above 0. How then? **Dt 15:10**: "You shall give to him freely, & your heart shall not be grudging when you give to him, because for this the Lord your God will bless you in all your work & in all that you undertake." Here: **God** loves a cheerful giver."

Now...*cheerful*. The same word from which we get "hilarious." Make of that what you will, but note especially this is the only place in the Bible where we hear that God specifically **loves** a particular person **doing** a particular thing. Why? **We** are never more like the Father (living out his image through the work of His Son/Spirit in us) than when we are generous AS HE IS. We KNOW when we live generously we are living the image of God because God is generous (rain on just & unjust...pays last worker same as first & gets cranky when that generosity is questioned - Mt 20:15)

But here's where this gets cool...1952 JB Phillips wrote **Your** God is Too Small...His point was simple...modern humanity has tricked itself into believing we're smarter more powerful more capable than ever & God is irrelevant to the problems we face the issues that plague us or the challenges to our world's survival. God's obviously not big enough to handle our needs so it's on us now. Little bitty gods Phillips says, "You have no idea...the god you're talking about is not the one in the Scriptures or on the cross." At the same time, he challenges Xns to trust that God is big enough even for us...our challenges, problems, worries, threats, needs...**AND** to live toward what God desires to see take place in us & through us in this world.

God is able to bless you abundantly, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work...Now he who supplies seed to the sower & bread for food will also supply & increase your store of seed & will enlarge the harvest of your righteousness. You will be enriched in every way so you can be generous on every occasion, & through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God.

God's abundance **TO** us is only limited by his abundance **THROUGH** us... Any sparse sowing is not for want of seed, but for want of trust in the heart of the sower or the desire to hold on to what has been given. God's abundant ceaseless provision means we will have enough to live **AND** enough to give **AND** share in every good work. Pauls' language runs away w/ superlatives so that we get a taste of his enthusiasm **AND** a glimpse of the Father's intent to multiply his work through our hands. Remember...Every promise God makes in the Scriptures points to the inexhaustible abundance God desires to give. Every miracle Jesus performs is more than enough. 120-180 gallons of the best wine. 12 baskets of leftovers after feeding 5000+. 7 baskets after feeding 4000+. Lazarus is not healed he is raised from the dead.

Over & over again the NT uses these 3 words: "**how** much more" & in every case the question asked is this: "how much more" will God generously give to provide for you...feed you, clothe you, give to you, forgive you, provide for you, bless you...how much more valuable are you to your Heavenly Father than sheep sparrows flowers...how much more good will he pour out on you than any earthly father? God's abundance is never-failing & when we invest those things God puts at our disposal

for His purposes according to His will - the supply to us is unending. NB...That unending supply is meant to add to the cycle of generous generosity fed by the surpassing grace of God given to you. It's never about what I get back or raising the balance sheet above the flood waters...But about finding joy in giving away what God has given richly to me & seeing those gifts multiply in their impact & increase.

This service that you perform is not only supplying the needs of the Lord's people but is also overflowing in many expressions of thanks to God. Because of the service by which you have proved yourselves, others will praise God for the obedience that accompanies your confession of the gospel of Christ, & for your generosity in sharing with them & with everyone else. In their prayers for you their hearts will go out to you, because of the surpassing grace God has given you. Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift! *What happens if no one is generous?*

What happens when we are generous? **The** needs of the saints are met. Hungry are fed. Churches planted & paid for. Gospel advanced. Simple obvious stuff.

But more...**Others** thank God & give glory to him. When you are generous, you become an answer to someone else's prayer. When God uses you to meet their needs, they will thank & glorify God because of you.

The unity/witness of the church is made visible. They will long for & pray for you because of your generosity to them. Those faces on the Compassion poster & our GBOs are but a small sign of how we are not just some hideaway fellowship in a little bldg in a little dot on the planet. We make Christ visible in our partnership & support that stretches from the rising of the sun to its setting. And the more generous we are the more times around the globe/city Christ wraps his saving love.

As we open our hands & hearts more widely more freely & more generously we find the Father refilling our lives to oversupply in joy praise thanksgiving & glory...**AND** the blessings in our hands multiply for even more...The grace of generosity taps the gushing spring of the Father's delight in blessing his children. **Thanks** be to God for his indescribable gift! Underlying whatever generosity we demonstrate is an even greater generosity: the generosity of the Father who did not spare even his own Son but gave him up for us...the generosity of Jesus who came to give his life as a ransom...No discussion of generosity begins or ends w/ us. It always begins & ends in Christ Jesus. He is generous & by his grace we are changed to be like him.

Take it home...

What do you imagine the church is **unable** to do right now but **would be able** to do if everyone gave generously?

How can you be a part of giving that idea traction through your generosity? *PRAY*