

“Cheerful Giving” - 2 Corinthians 9:6-12 - Rev. Jeff Childs

On the wall of President Lyndon Johnson's White House office hung a framed letter written by General Sam Houston (Just a picture) to Johnson's great-grandfather Baines more than a hundred years earlier. Sam Houston's signature makes the letter valuable, but the story behind it is much more significant. Baines was the man who had led Sam Houston to Christ. Houston was a changed man, no longer coarse and belligerent, but peaceful and content. The day came for Sam Houston to be baptized, an absolutely incredible event in the eyes of those who knew his previous lifestyle and attitude. After his baptism Houston stated he would like to pay half the local minister's salary. When someone asked him why, his simple response was, "My pocketbook was baptized too." Has your wallet been baptized?

The question at the end of those credit card commercials simply asked, “What’s in your wallet?” The question God may be asking us is, “Why is so much still in your wallet?” From verse 10 in the scripture this morning did you hear? *The one who supplies seed for planting...will supply and multiply your seed and will increase your crop, which is righteousness.* You maybe thought you had a wallet full of dollars, but they are really seeds that can be spread around to do good and grow a righteous crop. When we put all of our seeds together, we can truly make disciples for Jesus Christ and Change the World!

There’s an old story which told of a day when the traveling carnival came to town, the strong man was one of the most popular attractions. One of his tricks was to squeeze an orange dry with his bare hand. Then he would offer \$1,000 to anyone in the audience who could manage to squeeze even one more drop from that orange. Having nothing to lose, people were always ready to accept the challenge to make an easy \$1,000, but they always failed. They would squeeze and squeeze, but their efforts were fruitless. Then, an older man stepped up to try his strength. Other observers looked at one another and smiled slyly, knowing this fellow didn't stand a chance. The older man took the crushed orange and began to squeeze. Do you know, he didn't just get one single drop, he got six more drops from that flattened orange. The strong man and the spectators were amazed, but the older man looked the strong man in the face, shrugged his shoulders and humbly said, "Oh, it's no big deal. I'm the treasurer over at First Church, and I do this with our budget all the time." Friends, let me tell you the budget has been a little tight and we have felt the squeeze this year. But with your generous commitments for this year to come, I have been hoping and praying that we will have plenty to do what God is calling us to do for God and God’s mission.

The apostle Paul was feeling a little squeezed, also, as he took his financial concerns to the Corinthian congregation. The illustration of sowing seeds that Paul uses to explain himself sounds a little like one of Jesus' parables, doesn't it? However, Paul is talking about money when he writes, *"the one who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and the one who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully"* (2 Corinthians 9:6). It seems that Paul is implementing the very first church stewardship campaign. He has a real passion for stewardship, knowing that heartfelt giving sows the seeds of an eternal harvest.

According to the apostle Paul, love makes us, *“Contribute to the needs of the saints; and extend hospitality to strangers.”* (Romans 12.13) A former pastor of one of the congregations I served in NY used to say, “Don’t give till it hurts - give till it feels good!” And what did it say

in our text this morning? *God loves a cheerful giver!* Cheerful givers love God and give in return.

Bill Ritter teaches a short course to seminary seniors on money. This is what he teaches. First, he tells them they need to get in touch with their feelings about money....having it or not having it....desiring it or disdaining it. Second, he tells them that money is both a gift and a tool....and that their job is to teach people in their congregations how to receive gifts graciously and use tools wisely. And third, he tells them that they should not go anywhere near a pulpit to talk about money unless they truly believe:

that the Gospel is true.

that it really is in giving that we receive.

that people are created by God with a need to give.

that generous people really are the happiest people on the face of the earth.

and that what preachers are doing when they talk about giving is not extracting money, but saving lives.

The apostle John wrote, *we love because God first loved us.* (1 John 4.19) And the same could be said for giving. We give because God first gave to us Jesus. We give to God through the church because of the life, hope, faith and forgiveness of Christ. We share the Good News of Jesus with others because it was first shared with us. None of it begins with us. It all begins with God. We don't give because we have to. We give because God is first and we want to remind ourselves that God comes first. We give because God gave us his Son. Be a cheerful giver. Give till it feels good. Alleluia and Amen.

We Love the Lord

Jeffrey B. Childs 9/23/2024

We love the Lord, who first loved us,
Love in the form of Christ Jesus.
God sent to us the very best.
Praise be to God. We are so blessed.

May others see the Lord in us,
Who faithfully follow Jesus.
By all we do and all we say,
We share Good News along the way.

As God has shown God's love for us,
And offered us the Lord Jesus,
May we embrace faithful living,
And be known for cheerful giving.