

“Cheerful Giving” - 2 Corinthians 9:1-12 - Rev. Jeff Childs

On the wall of President Lyndon Johnson's White House office hung a framed letter written by General Sam Houston 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 asks, “What’s in your wallet?” The question God may be asking us is, “Why is so much still in your wallet?” From verse ten 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 our seeds together, we can help make disciples for Jesus Christ and Change the World!

This week we sent out a reminder email to those who had not replied to the initial **Earn. Save. Give.** stewardship letter. I am pleased to report that we now have 36 pledges turned in for a total of \$186,550 for the 2024 budget plus \$30,000 for the building fund. In a couple weeks, we will begin our “Piece of the Pie” 3-year Capitol Campaign to raise funds to help pay off the building mortgage. Pastor Jenny has offered to help us by writing to some of our former major donors, and from our initial asking of church leadership we already have pledges for \$30,000 even before the campaign begins next month. On Thanksgiving Sunday, November 26 you will be invited to come hear Pastor Jenny preach again and enjoy a piece of pie after the service.

In the reading this morning, the apostle Paul is feeling a little squeezed, as he takes his financial concerns to the Corinthian congregation. The conversation actually begins with chapter 8 and runs through chapter 9. The illustration of sowing seeds that Paul uses to explain himself sounds a little like one of Jesus' parables that I preached on this summer, 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) Rejoice in hope, serve the Lord, contribute to the needs. “Don’t give till it hurts but, give till it feels good!” God loves a cheerful giver! And cheerful givers love God and give in response to what they have received.

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 disdainning it. Second, he tells them that money is both a gift and a tool...and that their job is to teach people how to receive gifts graciously and use tools widely. 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! Remember what it says in John 3:16 – *For God so loved the world that he gave...* 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 but because we want to. We give because God gave first, and we want to remind ourselves that God comes first. We give because God gave us Jesus. Give till it feels good. Alleluia and Amen.

God Loves All the Cheerful Givers

Rev. Jeffrey B. Childs 10/26/23

God loves all the cheerful givers,
Let their gifts like blessings flow,
Like water in mighty rivers,
Going just where they need to go.

As you have been blessed to receive,
All the blessings God's given you.
Through giving may others believe,
By all that in God's name you do.

From heaven God smiles down on you,
In your journey you have come far.
Your actions let God's love shine through,
A generous giver you are.