

Give Thanks for God's Blessings

2 Corinthians 9:6-15

by the Rev. Dr. E. Scott Jones

First Central Congregational Church

18 November 2018

The Apostle Paul is on his way from Greece to Jerusalem to deliver an offering that he has been collecting. You see, Paul's preaching to Gentiles was controversial in the early church, so he entered into an agreement with the original disciples and part of that agreement was that the Gentile churches would remember and care for the poor Jewish Christians back in Judea. Paul then spent a good deal of time fundraising on this latest missionary journey. More than one of the letters of Paul contained within the New Testament were fundraising letters.

So, Paul's returning to Jerusalem to deliver the offering and he is bringing a contingent of Gentile Christians with him from Europe. They are going to stop in Corinth on their way, so Paul is encouraging Corinth to make a good showing of welcoming the delegation and also delivering their offering to him.

That's the context then for our scripture lesson today. Hear now the Word of the Lord.

2 Corinthians 9:6-15

The point is this: the one who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and the one who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully.

Each of you must give as you have made up your mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.

And God is able to provide you with every blessing in abundance, so that by always having enough of everything, you may share abundantly in every good work.

As it is written, "God scatters abroad, God gives to the poor; God's righteousness endures forever."

The One who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness.

You will be enriched in every way for your great generosity, which will produce thanksgiving to God through us; for the rendering of this ministry not only supplies the needs of the saints but also overflows with many thanksgivings to God.

Through the testing of this ministry you glorify God by your obedience to the confession of the gospel of Christ and by the generosity of your sharing with them and with all others, while they long for you and pray for you because of the surpassing grace of God that has been given you.

Thanks be to God for this indescribable gift!

For the Word of God in scripture,
For the Word of God among us,
For the Word of God within us,
Thanks be to God.

Let's begin today with a little stress reduction, okay? This week is Thanksgiving so it is typical for you to be asked what you are thankful for. Take a moment to think about that. What are you thankful for? Now turn to someone near you and share briefly.

Good. According to scientific studies your cortisol levels may have just been reduced by 23%. Which means you are less stressed than you were a few moments ago.

The scientific research into gratitude is rather clear at this point. According to positive psychologist Derrick Carpenter, "The benefits of practicing gratitude are nearly endless. People who regularly practice gratitude by taking time to notice and reflect upon the things they're thankful for experience more positive emotions, feel more alive, sleep better, express more compassion and kindness, and even have stronger immune systems."

Gratitude can improve our most intimate relationships, give us more disciplined self-control, increase our mental and physical health, make us more optimistic, and make us happier. Studies even demonstrate how individuals practicing gratitude improves society, as gratitude is contagious, spreading quickly from one person to other people. We all appreciate being thanked and in the glow of that appreciation are more likely to thank other people.

Gratitude also has a cathartic function, helping us to overcome feelings of guilt. When we let people down, one way to heal the breach is to express gratitude to that person for something they've done. Broken social relationships can be mended, and we can overcome our negative feelings.

And maybe most exciting is how easy it is to practice gratitude. Some of the virtues, like courage or humility, might be more difficult for us. But gratitude is one of the easiest to develop. Even simple practices like writing thank you notes or keeping a gratitude journal have been shown scientifically to have significant lasting effects upon our attitude and our character.

According to positive psychology, gratitude is ultimate more than being thankful, "it is more like a deeper appreciation for someone (or something,) which produces longer lasting positivity." Our thanksgiving, then, contributes to an overall emotional development within our character. We become people with a deeper appreciation for the world.

St. Paul encourages the Corinthians to be appreciative for the blessings of God that they have received. And these aren't simply material blessings. They should be grateful to God for their spiritual blessings. They are part of this new movement, slowly changing the world, making it more just and peace and holy.

And because of their gratitude, they should respond generously in hopes of passing those blessings along. Their gifts will increase the blessings, making them more available to more people.

Paul's fundraising appeal is for a vision of the world "so grand it almost takes the breath away" writes Calvin Roetzel. For Paul imagines a new world with a new humanity, united across the old divisions that once separated people, yet now all working together as sisters and

brothers in a common family united in purpose to achieve God's vision for the world. And Paul thinks, "Who wouldn't want to be part of that? Who wouldn't want to be an initial investor in the creation of a more just world?"

Paul calls this opportunity to donate money "an indescribable gift" for which we should give thanks to God. You could update the language. "This is going to be bigger than if you were an initial investor in Berkshire Hathaway!"

Only this time instead of a great financial return, you are contributing in the making of better world.

Guess what? That's still the church's financial appeal. 2,000 years later we are still in the business of making a better world—more just, more equitable, more peaceful, more loving and joyful.

So I thank you for your gifts and for your participation in God's on-going mission and the small part we play in that big picture here at First Central Congregational Church.

Happy Thanksgiving. And "Thanks be to God for this indescribable gift!"