

June 27, 2021

Texts: Psalm 130, 2 Corinthians 8: 7-15

Title: "The Grace of Giving"

I'm sure that many of you have heard of an oxymoron. It's a Greek word that means "pointedly foolish." You make an oxymoron when you put two words together that are complete opposites. They contradict each other. Some of my favorites are "clearly confused," or "open secret," or as someone once said, "jumbo shrimp" is an oxymoron.

Samuel Goldwyn, a famous movie producer from years ago was famous for his contradictory statements like, "Give me a smart idiot over a stupid genius any day" and "Gentlemen, I want you to know that I am not always right, but I am never wrong." And this one from Dolly Parton, who once said, "You'd be surprised how much it costs to look this cheap."

I wonder if the apostle Paul laughed when he wrote the words from our Bible passage today. He wants to tell the believers in the Corinthian church about the incredible spiritual work God is doing in the Macedonian church. He says, "In the midst of a very severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity." (vs. 2) This could be the Mother of all Oxymorons! The Macedonian church, although undergoing a severe trial, was experiencing overflowing joy. And even though they lived in extreme poverty, that joy resulted in rich generosity toward other believers who were in need. How often do severe trials and extreme poverty go hand-in-hand with overflowing joy and rich generosity? What did these folks know that we don't? (*Tell of my experience in*

*Russia early 1990's; the generosity of the people there.*) So, if generosity doesn't depend on resources, what does it depend on? Have you ever said "Once we have more money, then we'll give more to others."

In our reading from lesson from 2 Corinthians, Paul uses the Macedonian's giving spirit as a challenge to the church at Corinth. He says to them, "But since you excel in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in complete earnestness and in the love we have kindled in you—see that you also excel in this grace of giving" (v 7).

Very tactful, Paul was. He's not asking that they increase their giving. But wants them to see that their **giving is a natural consequence of their devotion to God. And why would that be true? One reason has to do with the seductive nature of wealth.** Money can do a lot of wonderful things. The danger would be that the more one has, the more one can become focused on trying to keep it and to manage it and it can become the focus of one's life very easily.

A Gallup poll not too long ago showed that donations to charity tend to decrease as income increases. You've probably heard it said that Jesus talked more about money than any other subject. No wonder he warned not to serve God and mammon too. Giving is a spiritual question, not just a dollars and cents question.

Money isn't everything but it's part of the "superpower" of generosity that blesses both giver and receiver.

And finally, **giving is a spiritual matter because we worship a giving God.** Paul follows the two verses I've already mentioned by saying: "For you know the

generous act of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich” (v 9). In other words, Jesus gave up everything he had and took on the form of a servant to show us the incredible riches of God’s love for us. We worship a giving God and He says to us there’s only one way that we can become truly rich. That’s by giving—all we have and all we are in the manner of Christ.

Christian author Randy Alcorn writes, “Jesus said it is more blessed to give, but He never says why. Here’s my why behind his statement. When you keep what you have, you will be blessed. The more you keep, the more you have to spend on yourself, etc. If you give, on the other hand, two people will be blessed, you and the recipient. Keeping blesses one—giving blesses two. . . People never discover the second blessing until they actually do it, and I’ve learned the more they do it the more addictive giving becomes.”

God is love, and out of that overflowing love God is blessing us. Our love for God and trust in God’s blessings set us free to be a blessing to others. That’s the power behind the “oxymoron” in our reading today...that Severe trials + extreme poverty + love for God = Overflowing joy and rich generosity.

What about you and I? Have we discovered the power of this truth in all its fullness? If not, wouldn’t today be a great time to discover in a greater way, the grace of giving? Amen.