

Wealth of Generosity
2 Corinthians 8:1-9, 13-15
June 30, 2024

As the text was read, what was the first thing to hit you? Here are these churches who have been tested severely. They are poor. They have undergone persecution from the Romans. But what do they have? It appears they have an abundance of faith, and thanksgiving for what those like Paul, Silas and Titus have done for them by bringing them the Good News of Jesus. I know we are spoiled as we have a church on every corner, well three out of four corners, and the Word of God is probably in our pockets or on our tablet as well as how many copies in our homes.

We maybe have known some poverty but nothing like what Paul is writing about. These people probably had little and for them to raise funds to send to Jerusalem, to Jewish Christians who maybe didn't have that high of regard for them as they probably thought what could those poverty ridden congregations do for them? Judea, the area Jesus lived, traveled, witnessed to who He was and what He came to do saw themselves as, I guess, leaders in lives lived for Christ and here are some lowly congregations wanting to respond to their outreach through Paul and others, doing what they with their limited resources could do to aide them in their time of need.

We have been blessed, not only with the Word but monetarily as I have said more than once you are a congregation that likes to give for the spreading of the Word to others. You want others to come to the knowledge of the Truth, to turn to Jesus in the faith given them so that others can give thanks and tell others of who Jesus is and what He has done.

You have been supporting Pr. Cramm to go to South Sudan and other places in Africa to teach those men who want to do better at bringing the Good News of Jesus to those in their world. From the information we have gotten from Pr. Cramm, these people, our brothers and sisters are poor. He has tried to inform us but I don't think we have any idea as to what they have to go through on a day to day basis to survive. They have had to deal with war and those who would take their lives. They have had to deal with diseases that will take many of their lives at about half the age most of us will be when the Lord takes us to be with Him. They have to deal with poverty we will never experience.

They come from many miles, leaving families behind so that they can learn to bring the Good News in a much more informed way so that they get it right, not

following the directions of man but of God, through His Word and through things like the catechism and other sources to help them to understand and inwardly digest the Word that we are so familiar with.

I know we raise funds to help them all the while not even thinking they could somehow help us if we were in trouble but would it have to be trouble of the monetary kind? Might they in their faith give us something more?

You may be thinking, "What do they have to give us?" I can hear the Jerusalem church saying the same thing but when the widespread famine hit the area and they were calling on the Lord to bring about a change for them, where does God go to help them? He goes to those they would least expect to receive help.

Had they heard of the Christians in Macedonia who were much like those of South Sudan? Maybe, yet for them to expect anything from them would seem like an impossibility. Yet, they in their poverty come through for them.

My Mom tells of what it was like Africa earlier in her life. She said the countries there were raising so much grain, in her day that they were exporting grain. If we think about it, where did Jacob have to go to get away from the famine that was in Israel? He went to Africa, where God had blessed Egypt to such and extent that they ended up feeding the whole world at the time.

Yes, they may be poor now but what might they have that we might need? Paul was trying to shame the Corinthians who had so much more than the Macedonian Churches and yet in the shaming, he was wanting them to see what people, brothers and sisters with little were doing, begging to help their fellow brothers and sisters in Judea.

The Corinthian church had much more than the Macedonian church and could do much without such a sacrifice. Yes, Paul was pointing out the need of the church in Judea but also the poverty that the Corinthians were facing even though they didn't think they were impoverished.

You have probably heard about those who complain about not having enough even though they were talking with their mouths full. I imagine that is what Paul was thinking as he wrote this second letter to the Corinthians.

Yes, we have much and give much and yet are we short in some area? Pr. Cramm has made the comment of how those in South Sudan make it a point to proclaim they are Christians when they are meeting someone. When was the last time you met someone and one of the first things out of your mouth is that you are a

Christian? I don't know how it is taken over in Africa but I can imagine it might not be taken the same way here. If you were to begin with that here, you may get someone questioning your motives. They might think you were somehow going to take advantage of them as there are so many scam artists out there who will point out they are Christians. We might not say we are Christians but live by the motto, "They will know we are Christians by our love." Yet, even with that motto, what challenges do we have with that? Many today are taught that Christians aren't showing love when they proclaim the Word of God even the Word of God that tells those who go against the Law of God that they are wrong. They are in danger of the love of a God who is also just and punishes wrong and will allow them to continue in something known as sin even though it might mean they will find themselves in hell in the end.

I don't know how well the South Sudanese are about pointing out sin? I would think they are better at it than us but maybe not, we will have to ask Pr. Cramm when we see him again.

Paul was pointing out to the Corinthians where they could do better. It should be a heads up for us too, to do better. Like Paul says, it is not a command but a chance to show your love and that it is genuine.

If you are ever asked why you do what you do as a Christian, what do you say? How many point to Jesus? You are named after Him so for you to point to Jesus should not be a problem. It is He who did it all for you and for all, including the person asking the question.

Paul points out how Jesus was rich. How was He rich? He had the whole world in His hands. He created it in the beginning and living in heaven, He watched over it all, working in it day by day to have His will done. He is not like the watchmaker who makes it all then winds it up and lets it go through. No, He is involved with His creation day by day especially about 2000 years ago when He came to this earth to live as a human being, leaving His perfect heaven to live in a world of sin, hunger, thirst, suffering and loss. He gave up so much for His creation, so much that He was the only one who could do what He did for it.

Jesus had it all and yet came to be one of His creatures. We might think that as a sacrifice too great and yet He sacrificed, became a poor human being in more ways than one. He didn't come as the wise men thought He should come, come as a king, born in a Mansion that should be due one who is the King of the world. No, instead He was born in a stable, in poverty to a couple who made their living as lowly carpenters.

Jesus was God and yet as Paul wrote to the *Philippians: 2:5-7* *Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though He was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.*

He emptied Himself, now that is poverty from the Supreme being, God to someone who serves others, at their whim, under someone else's thumb. He did that to show that it wasn't for Himself but for you and I and the rest of the world.

He gave it all up for us. So maybe we may not have the word "Christian" come out of our mouths and yet even though we might not say that, what should we say? We say they will know we are Christians by our love and yet how is that played out in our lives?

We have had a couple pastors from South Sudan come here to tell us about themselves. We know that last pastor to come had a wife who was going blind but the Lord has stepped in with His healing hand inner life and we pray that the foreboding blindness is gone and she can continue to take care of the family who are so far away from here.

These pastors left their families to come to seminary so that they could be better trained to go back and teach other pastors, or pastors to be, the truth of God's Word. It was so important for them that they are enduring separation from their families even though those left behind will have much to endure as they are challenged to continue on with the family without the breadwinner there to pull his share of the load.

We for the most part have it easy. The Lord has blessed us with much. We have not been persecuted the way those from Macedonia were or those who lived in Jerusalem had to endure the famine. Oh, some of you may have had to endure the great depression but you were fairly small at the time if you were alive then.

The thing of it is, we may not always have it so good, then what? Will we be ready to sacrifice for others to know Jesus and to help others that are going through tougher times than we are going through? I pray we will step up if that time comes and we can, as Paul wrote: overflow in a wealth of generosity.