

Sermon for Thanksgiving Sunday Yr A, 9/10/2011

Based on 2 Cor 9:6-15

By Rev. Garth Wehrfritz-Hanson

Chaplain of The Good Samaritan Society's
South Ridge Village, Medicine Hat, Alberta

“God’s generosity and ours”

The pro football team had just finished practice when a turkey strutted onto the field.

“I want to try out,” the turkey told the coach.

Stunned, the players stared as the bird caught pass after pass and ran right through the defensive line.

After 30 minutes, the coach had seen enough. “You’re excellent,” he said. “Sign with us, and you’ll get a huge bonus.”

“Forget the bonus,” the turkey said. “All I want to know is, does the season go past Thanksgiving?”¹

Well, we are not turkeys, so we don’t have to worry about surviving past Thanksgiving. Rather, according to the apostle Paul in our passage from 2 Corinthians today; we can live with an attitude of thanksgiving. In this chapter and in the previous chapter eight, Paul is gathering a collection for the Church in Jerusalem, which was most likely a Jewish-Christian Church. Paul, had been sent out as an apostle to the Gentiles. In chapter eight, he had asked the Christians in Macedonia to make a contribution to the collection for the Jerusalem Christians. The Macedonians, even though they lived in extreme poverty gave generously to the collection. In many churches today, the poorest members may also be the most generous givers. Now Paul is hoping for the same thing to happen at Corinth—even though they seem to be a more affluent church. So he addresses the Corinthian Church by instructing them on practical principles of giving. He teaches them about faithful Christian stewardship.

Paul starts off with this simple, yet practical principle: “The one who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and the one who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully.” In the world of agriculture, this is quite true. You who have a farming background likely can vouch for this truth. I know my dad used to tell of a farmer that he knew who did sow his seed rather sparingly. When harvest time came, his crop did not yield as much as the other farmers’ crops either. The farmers who sowed bountifully ended up with bountiful crops at harvest time. What is true in the world of agriculture is also true in the life of the Christian Church. Churches do not necessarily lack resources—rather, they lack the commitment to generously give their resources in order that the whole Church might be blessed and benefit from them. So Paul instructs the Corinthians to be generous in their giving—to sow bountifully.

From there, Paul tells the Corinthians and us that each person is free to give what they decide. He then emphasises three factors that help them and us to decide how to give.

Paul says that one should not give *reluctantly*. In other words, not grudgingly or miserly; not out of regret. A person who gives reluctantly is likely too attached to what they are giving; it is difficult for them to give it away. Moreover, they also may find it hard to give in a spirit of joy if they are a reluctant giver. Such a person may be resentful and feel that they *have to give* rather than reach a place where they *want to give*.

Paul goes on to say that one should not give *under compulsion*. A person should not be forced into giving; nor should one be manipulated to give against one’s will. The giver should never give because of coercive, arm-twisting tactics. Unfortunately, every so often there is a televangelist who employs such coercive, arm-twisting tactics and ends up fleecing a lot of viewers and misusing their contributions in corrupt ways. Of course, those hostile to or outside

the Church may then unfairly judge the vast majority of Christians in the same way as that charlatan televangelist. So, Paul says, never give under compulsion.

Paul then gives the Corinthians and us another pointer to help decide how to give—he says: *“God loves a cheerful giver.”* A cheerful giver is a person who tells him or herself that they have enough; so they are willing to share what has been given them. Even more, a cheerful giver is often a sacrificial giver—willing to give to others and improve their quality of life, even if that means their own life will endure a hardship. The following story illustrates this truth very well:

Some businessmen from a tractor company were in Japan looking over building sites for a new plant they were going to build. They were photographing some land on the edge of a city when they saw something unusual in an adjoining rice field: an old man was pulling a single furrow plow while his son guided it. The Americans were amused by that and took many pictures to “show the guys back home how much they need our tractors over here.” A few days later one of the businessmen was showing the pictures to a missionary in a nearby village, still joking about how they farm in Japan. The missionary looked at the photos and said, “I know that father and son. They are members of our village church. They didn't always farm that way. You see, when we built our mission church they wanted to give something, but they were so poor they couldn't. So they sold their oxen and gave the money to the church. Until they can afford another team, they'll have to pull the plow themselves.” Most people contribute, but there is a great deal of difference between a contribution and a sacrificial gift. *“God loves a cheerful giver.”*²

Coming back to the Corinthian Church; Paul goes on to say that cheerful generous giving is often blessed by God. God generously, abundantly blesses such givers with enough of everything. Paul tells the Corinthians and us: *“You will be enriched in every way for your*

great generosity, which will produce thanksgiving to God." The following story is a good example of God's abundance towards a faithful giver:

Before the missionary Hudson Taylor made his famous first trip to China, he was a struggling medical student and evangelist living on very little, stretched further by his faithful tithing. After an evening prayer service Hudson led, a poor man asked him to come back to his house and pray for his dying wife; though they were Catholic, they could not afford a priest to give last rites. Praying there, Hudson suddenly felt convicted of the poverty he saw and the coin in his own pocket. Resisting several times, remembering only his own need of it, he finally relented when the man at last broke and pleaded for any help Hudson could offer. It was the last half-crown Hudson had to live on but the next day he received an envelope with indecipherable writing and blurred postage. Inside was a half-sovereign—four times what he had given twelve hours before.³

So, as the apostle Paul says, the fruit of generous giving is thanksgiving. On this Thanksgiving Sunday, may we be filled with a generosity of giving our time, talents and treasures; realizing that they all come from the LORD's abundant provision; he is the Source of all we are and have. So in response, our hearts, minds and lives say with the apostle Paul: "*Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!*" Jesus our Friend, Brother, Saviour and Lord. Amen.

1 *Reader's Digest*, October 2007, p. 36.

2 *Emphasis* online, <www.sermonsuite.com/>.

3 *Ibid. Emphasis online.*