

One in Christ Sunday
January 31, 2016

Text: 2 Corinthians 8:1-12

Theme: God Enables Us to Overflow in this Grace of Giving

1. Motivated by the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ
2. Inspired by the example of our fellow believers
3. Expressing our thankfulness from the heart

I want to ask a question, and I want you to raise your hand to answer if you have one. What blessings have you personally received from our National church body WELS?...They are almost too numerous to count. We'll talk more about those in as we go. So we've been encouraged by our synod to consider how we might contribute to this special offering of thanks to help reduce or eliminate the debt as you heard in the video. But why? Why should we or maybe better is why would we, a congregation that's got plenty of challenges of its own, be moved to do so. Paul highlights a number of thoughts as we ponder how **God enables us to overflow in this Grace of Giving.**

When the apostle encourages Christians to "excel in the grace of giving," he isn't urging us to compete with others for the top spot. The word translated "excel" literally means to "overflow," like a spring that constantly provides water. And "the grace of giving" that God gives his people describes our attitude towards giving, not the amount of gifts. It isn't something that comes naturally. By nature we hated God and loved stuff; we were selfish and stingy, greedy and envious, looking after only our own interests. How lost we were! We had no idea that we were like the rich fool of Jesus' parable who was not rich towards God.

Even as Christians, we have to fight the Old Adam's misplaced motives for giving. Self-righteousness. Guilt. Peer pressure. The church needs it. The budget calls for it. Too often our motives are faulty too. We need this grace of giving from God to sanctify us and our behaviors. And he provides it when Paul points us to the primary reason that we do anything whether as a congregation or as individuals or as part of a larger body of like-minded believers called a synod.

For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich. A month ago we reflected on this truth that the Son of God took on human flesh and blood being born in Bethlehem. He had everything. The praise of the angels. The glory of heaven. The power and dominion over the whole world, yet he left it all, not to fill himself still more, but Paul says **for your sakes.** It was for you to make you truly wealthy and rich beyond compare in the forgiveness of sins and making you and eternal heir of his heavenly kingdom.

That is our reason for giving, that we might continue ourselves to grow in faith. But we also recognize that Jesus' life and death are not for us alone, but for the whole world lost in sin. And our gifts support that work we do here locally in Elkhorn, and through our Synod around the world, bringing this message of God's rich grace to people in every corner of the earth.

And we can say, why can't others do that? What about all these needs here in Elkhorn? We have our own cares and concerns. To the Corinthians, Paul held up the Macedonians – probably the saints he served in congregations in Philippi, Thessalonica, and Berea. They were undergoing persecution and suffering from deep poverty. But that didn't stop them from giving and supporting the gospel work. In fact quite the opposite, God's grace compelled them to give generously to the needs of others as they looked beyond themselves and trusted in him who promised to meet their needs.

To us too, when the temptation is to say, we need this and we're cutting back here and we carry our own debt. All are true, we like the congregations of Macedonia have personal and ministry needs, but this is not an either

or proposition. It's both and. As you ponder God's love for you and consider his gifts and are **Inspired by the example of our fellow believers**, I am confident you will respond.

We were talking about this the other day in Catechism class in regards to the 4th Petition where we pray Give us this day our daily bread. You know not one of the kids on Wednesday had missed a meal. You know not one of the kids wondered how they'd get home or where they'd sleep. Every single one of them had multiple nice clean outfits from which to choose to wear to school that day. It's certainly true that God not only gives us bread, he gives us cake. A big piece with frosting. Yet too often, we worry. Trust God to provide what you need. He promises to do so.

This One in Christ offering opportunity was rolled out last fall already. Some of your brothers and sisters have already contributed a quarter of the overall goal. We join our voices in praising God for that and we thank him for the privilege of this opportunity to support that work. I asked you to share a few thoughts earlier about the blessings you've received from the WELS? Did you know that every one of your called workers is a blessing from synod? None of us grew up here. We all have been trained through our college and in some cases seminary with an education that not only is focused on Scripture, but one in which the costs are subsidized by generous gifts to synod from congregations and individuals so that when the next vacancy occurs we can find a suitable candidate. We have members who have gone through Luther Prep and our other synodical schools who are not serving in full-time ministry capacities but nevertheless use their training in service to God here in various public and private ways.

There are more blessings. Fidelity to God's Word that's maintained and fostered through joint conferences and conventions. Mission work on your behalf that is being done literally around the globe. Through our regular offerings to synod you support work in Asia, Africa, Central America, South America, and in our own United States. Youth rallies that provide not only fun, but training and inspiration as well. Publications that support our worship, Sunday School, School and spiritual growth for all ages. Prison ministry to 80,000 inmates who can hear the gospel and turn in repentance. All this is your work, not that of some nebulous or nondescript group. Work that we are privileged not only to receive from but to support and enhance.

For all these and so many other blessings we don't have time to enumerate, we give thanks to God. We give thanks with our mouths in prayer and song. We give thanks with our bodies through lives dedicated to growing in him and to serving him. We give thanks in our offerings about which the Apostle Paul writes, **For if the willingness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has, not according to what he does not have.** Whatever it was that the impoverished people of Macedonia gave it was an acceptable thank offering to the Lord. Whatever it is that the Corinthians presented to Paul for the congregation at Jerusalem it was an offering of thanks presented in faith. For us too, in both our regular gifts that support our local work here and the work of synod around the globe and the special offering we gather today, we are expressing our thanks from the heart for the blessing of salvation which makes us coheirs with Christ and co-workers in his gospel kingdom today and always.

Because of his blessings and through the gift of the Holy Spirit, **God enables us to overflow in this grace of giving.**