

The Steward's Lifestyle 2 Corinthians 8:3-7

The text for our final week in our stewardship theme, Living Each Day as a Steward, is found in 2 Corinthians chapter 8, our New Testament Lesson for today.

Within this letter that St. Paul writes to the congregation at Corinth, is the actual account of what the Macedonian Christians, people in the congregations of Philippi, Thessalonica, and that area, had done in response. What had they done? They had contributed for the benefit of the starving Christians in Jerusalem.

You can sit there and say to yourself, "that's nice, but that's what all the congregations were being asked to do," or, you can go a little deeper into this text with me and see why St. Paul holds up this account as an example to the congregation at Corinth and an example for us as well.

St Paul highlights three ideas in the text that are worth noting regarding the giving of the Macedonians. I would like to highlight them for you today. These three ideas provide us with guidance as we evaluate ourselves and our giving. First, the text says they gave beyond their ability. These congregations were experiencing hard times themselves, but despite their deep poverty they gave. Second, they wanted to give, of their own free will.

So much so, that the text says they begged and pleaded with Paul and Timothy for the privilege of sharing in this service to the saints. Paul and Timothy tried to restrain them somewhat, but the Macedonians quite literally pleaded to be able to participate. They wanted the grace of God that St. Paul speaks of in the first verse of this eighth chapter, the fellowship in giving, being in one communion with all the other churches in the same grace. As it turns out, they were making a joy of robbing themselves.

I am reminded of the story of Vince Dicamillo. He was at college enjoying his life when the Great Depression was beginning. But with the stock market crash, his family called him home. The business his father owned was bankrupt and his parents had lost their home.

Once home, Vince was given the task of helping to collect some back debts owed to his family. On his first call he climbed the broken steps of an old dilapidated house. He knocked and two small children came to the door. They were dirty and their clothes were like rags. He asked, "Is anybody home?"

"I am," said the first child as a third child entered the room. Together they said, "I am." Just then a worn and tired looking mother came into the room. "Is there anything I can do?" she asked. Vince hesitated, he felt it was useless to try to collect the bill from a family living in such poverty. Finally, he pulled from his pocket his last two-dollar bill. He handed it to the woman and said, "It is for the kids to see the circus," and then he left.

This is a true story, and Vince went on to become a successful building contractor. As he reflected on that early experience, he said, “I felt so uplifted about that small gift that I gave that woman, that I’ve continued the policy. God helped me develop a lifestyle of giving. I didn’t plan it that way, but the more I give, the more I seem to get back in return. That’s God’s promise in regard to giving.”

In the words of our text, St. Paul refers to those who gave according to their means and beyond. The result was that God blessed them bountifully. It was true then, it was true in the Great Depression, and it is true today.

We could stop right here and end this sermon right now having learned some solid truths about living each day as a steward. I’m sure that old snake, Satan would prefer that. Except that we’ve only noted two of the three ideas I spoke of earlier, and that third idea is extremely important.

Looking at the Macedonians we can say that they gave to the “max,” to the very limit of giving, in order to get into the communion of giving to the fullest extent possible. The third idea that we need to note is one that took Paul and Timothy by surprise. St. Paul writes that they didn’t do “*as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then by the will of God to us.*” They gave themselves first to God and then to the mission. All their living was in the absolute care of God. Then whatever amount was given, large or small, what was given was acceptable because it was given from the right attitude.

God's Word and Sacraments are God's means of grace through which God empowers us to give of ourselves. As the Holy Spirit works through Word and Sacraments, God teaches us to become givers rather than takers and transforms us into people who use their lives, gifts, and treasures in service to the Lord as Christian stewards. When we become self-giving people, God is pleased because God wants us, not our gifts. St. Paul says in 2 Corinthians 12:14 "*I seek not what is yours but you.*" When God has all of us, our deeds of stewardship grow into a lifestyle of stewardship.

In that regard each one of us is called on by St. Paul's words in this 8th chapter of 2 Corinthians to see if we as individuals are dead or alive in Christ.

As St. Paul said to the Corinthian Christians, their giving would be a test to see if their faith was genuine. If our faith is dead, we will have little or no response to Christ's love and the needs of other. Are any of you here this morning dead?

We remember God tells us that we are all dead in our trespasses and sin, and I didn't see any hands go up to my last question. That must mean that we all claim to be alive. That is only possible through Jesus, the Son of God. He died when he didn't have to, and he rose again. But more important, Jesus gives us new life through our faith. That's the very same faith created in us through our baptism. That must be where all Christians are then, and all of us here this morning – alive in Christ.

That's what ministry is all about. It's a positive response that stresses positive things. For example: the Christian love and caring that is shown in this family. Yes, it is a positive response very much in tune with God's Word to us here in Paul's letter to the Corinthians and elsewhere in Scripture. It doesn't deal with pulling back or cutting the ministry we are doing. In reality, it looks at expanding the ministry of Jesus Christ through this family by waking everyone up and responding in faith. So, wake up and live a stewardship lifestyle.

Certainly, it is more pleasing to give than to receive, but it may be more fun as well. Sharing may be necessary, but it doesn't have to be grim. As a matter of fact, God has promised to bless it. We have God's Word on it.

Christ has chosen each and every one of us to be alive. However, our command hasn't been, "Don't let anyone know." It is just the opposite. Our starting point is the one exemplified by the Macedonians. They gave themselves first to the Lord." The challenge is before us. We join together this morning to respond to what God has done for us in our Savior Jesus Christ that God may bless US in the mission and ministry of this good congregation.

Amen!