

Sixth Sunday after Pentecost
July 1, 2018
Christ the Rock Evangelical Church
Farmington, NM

2 Corinthians 8:1-9,13,14 And now, brothers and sisters, we want you to know about the grace that God has given the Macedonian churches. **2** In the midst of a very severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity. **3** For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability. Entirely on their own, **4** they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the Lord's people. **5** And they exceeded our expectations: They gave themselves first of all to the Lord, and then by the will of God also to us. **6** So we urged Titus, just as he had earlier made a beginning, to bring also to completion this act of grace on your part. **7** 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.

8 I am not commanding you, but I want to test the sincerity of your love by comparing it with the earnestness of others. **9** For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich. **13** Our desire is not that others might be relieved while you are hard pressed, but that there might be equality. **14** At the present time your plenty will supply what they need, so that in turn their plenty will supply what you need. The goal is equality,

“The Grace of Giving Generously”

This morning I would like to address all the royalty in the building. Now, you may have moved past the phase in your life when you played dress up and put a tiara on your head. You may have given up hope that a charming young prince will swoop in and sweep you off your feet. You may be satisfied with being treated to a royal banquet each year on Mother's Day or allowing every edict falling from your lips to become reality on your birthday. A majority of the time you may actually feel like a poor peasant. But today God wants you to know that you are a recipient of his abundant generosity. In Jesus Christ, you have been given greater riches and glory and power than any monarch on any throne. You have his grace. And the way the Apostle Paul outlines it for us here in 2 Corinthians chapter 8, that grace wells up inside God's people and overflows in generosity. He is opening our eyes to the grace of giving generously.

Paul takes a delicate approach. He uses the example of other Christians in another part of the world. He begins this section: **“And now, brothers and sisters, we want you to know about the grace that God has given the Macedonian churches. In the midst of a very severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity.”** (2 Corinthians 8:1,2) It's tricky whenever you compare people. Just ask the younger sister of an honor student or bookish brother of an all-star pitcher. But Paul isn't using a comparison to start a rivalry or to shame the people who are reading his letter. He is looking to build them up. He maintains a positive tone. He just wants to communicate in a concrete way the grace of giving generously and how that works in the lives of Christians.

This is a good way of helping God's people to see what they do have instead of focusing on what they don't have. You've probably heard the quote from John D. Rockefeller when a newspaper reporter asked him how much money is enough money, he replied: "Just a little bit more."¹ There is a natural tendency in human beings to think I would be generous if only I had a little bit more. We think of it in terms of winning the lottery. If I had a million dollars, I'd take care of everyone in my family. Well, if you aren't paying your child support now when you have a decent job, would you really do any better if the amount were different? I'd establish a scholarship fund for at risk children if I won the lottery. Well, would you really, if you don't donate your time with after school programs or help with homework now? The Apostle Paul gives us the example of Christians in the province of Macedonia because they weren't looking for excuses, just opportunities: **"For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability. Entirely on their own, they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the Lord's people."** (2 Corinthians 8:3,4) God wants us to see ourselves from the perspective of wealthy royal sons and daughters of our generous King.

There is a reason why we all like playing with that idea of royalty. There's an appeal even when we grow out of that desire to wear gowns and place crowns on our heads. We like to think of ourselves as being on top. No matter if we have a lot or a little, we like to be in charge. We want to have final say in what we do with it and how we spend it. We even like the idea of having enough - having enough money or power or respect or status - to have other people do what we tell them to do. We like the concept of being able to take care of ourselves and our family and still have enough left over to share with other people. We want to be able to secure our own place and make sure we won't find ourselves in any need and then we can turn to the people around us, the people in our social circles and neighborhoods, communities and society. We like the thought of having enough that we could turn around and be generous. If I were comfortable enough, then I could think of the less fortunate. If I had all the things that would make me happy, then I could turn around and help people in need. When I have the respect and status I deserve, then I can concentrate on helping someone else improve their life.

But what if we had all those things? What if we ever got to reach the level where we could consider ourselves kings and queens? What if we had all that stuff, would it ever be enough? Or would we always want just a little bit more? Recently hearing about two celebrity suicides really got me asking some questions. A few weeks ago fashion designer Kate Spade took her own life. A few days later celebrity chef, author and TV personality Anthony Bourdain took his life. I have to admit I don't really know a lot about either one. I don't personally know them. I'm not much of a fashion expert or a gourmet chef. But each one could be considered highly successful and well-respected, not just in their field but in mainstream culture as well. And we don't know what caused them to take their own lives. But they had the money and popularity and power that so many of us spend so much of our lives chasing after. And for them at least, it wasn't enough. They weren't able to see themselves as good enough. Their lives weren't worth living.

¹ http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/John_D._Rockefeller

God wants us to look at our lives differently. God wants to transition us from looking at what you don't have to see what He has given you. He wants to help you change from the natural human way of doing things and looking at our lives to the grace way. Grace comes to you in the person of Jesus Christ: **"For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich."** (2 Corinthians 8:9) For all the times you get stuck in making excuses for what you would do if only you had just a little bit more, Jesus didn't hesitate. He just acted. He descended from his throne in heaven for all the times when you can't bring yourself to move generosity into action. The Ruler of the universe became a helpless baby. The One who commands planets took residence in the home of peasant parents. The Commander of angel armies was betrayed by a kiss and held prisoner by mortal soldiers. The Author of Life had his life extinguished by execution on the cross.

By the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ you are rich. He gives you the infinite riches of your Almighty Lord. He adopts you into his family to grant you all the privileges of your heavenly Father. Jesus sought you out so he could spill open for you the royal treasury of blessings and bust open the storehouse of his limitless power and wealth and glory.

The approach of the Apostle Paul is to help us realize what we do have, understand the extreme riches already in our possession. This change in perspective helps make the difference in action: **"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."** (2 Corinthians 8:7) In other words, this is who you are as Christians. This is what you have as children of God. Sometimes we just need help and guidance to see how to live it out. We get to look at our lives and the opportunities all around us with the mind of Christ.

Transition from natural mentality toward looking at our lives and the things we have toward adopting the mind of Christ. We see this in our other two Bible readings today. Jeremiah had seen devastation and destruction because God's people had been unfaithful to him. Yet he had hope. Not in himself or what he could acquire for himself, but in the Lord: **"the Lord's...his compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness."** (Lamentations 3:22,23) The father of the little girl who got sick and then died was privileged to hear this encouragement from Jesus himself: **"Don't be afraid; just believe."** (Mark 5:35) Despite the facts, despite what facts lay in front of him, he was able to take Jesus at his word and be confident of his Savior's rescue.

And there are practical benefits too. Have you ever gone to a garage sale and come home empty handed? I know it's a challenge. But sometimes you sift through all the items for sale and say to yourself, 'I already have one of these. Mine is actually newer. This looks nice, but I don't really need it.' Instead, you start to think about all the things you own that you could be giving away. When we take inventory of overflowing riches in Christ we can do what Romans 12:1 tells us: **"Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship."** Giving generously has practical benefits. Practicing generosity helps us see how truly rich we already are. The more you give away, the more you realize

you already have. And we can do it with confidence that we aren't doing it to gain approval or stockpile points with God. Instead, we have this assurance: **"Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain."** (1 Corinthians 15:58)

People always speculate on the reasons why someone takes their own life. We always get in dangerous territory trying to dig into the deepest recesses of a person's soul. But it was reported that Kate Spade had recently signed a multi-billion dollar fashion deal. Anthony Bourdain's career was going full speed ahead. They were both astonishing successes by almost any measure. The riches of God's grace give us something stronger. Embracing God's grace as the source of riches gives release from the anxiety of always needing more, always feeling like we don't have enough. We have relief from finding value and security and meaning in the things we can stockpile.

Most importantly by giving of ourselves generously we have the opportunity to touch the lives of others for eternity. We can do more than help someone improve their educational standing, although that is important. We can do more than help someone deal with depression, although that is one of the more compassionate things we can work on. We can do more than help pull someone out of poverty, no matter how much that might improve their life. By giving the overflowing grace that has already been given to us, we can give them the infinite riches of an inheritance with Christ. There is no greater generosity than abundantly sharing the gift of God's grace. Amen.