

Thanksgiving | 2 Corinthians 9:6-15  
November 25/26, 2015 | Parkland Evangelical Lutheran Church

**In Nomine Iesu**

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Almighty God, our heavenly Father, Your mercies are new to us every morning, and, though we have in no way deserved Your goodness, You abundantly provide for all our needs of body and soul: Give us, we pray, Your Holy Spirit, that we may heartily acknowledge Your merciful goodness toward us, give thanks for all Your benefits, and serve You in willing obedience; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one true God, now and forever. Amen.

**2 Corinthians 9:6-15**

The point is this: whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work. As it is written, *"He has distributed freely, he has given to the poor; his righteousness endures forever."*

He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness. You will be enriched in every way to be generous in every way, which through us will produce thanksgiving to God. For the ministry of this service is not only supplying the needs of the saints but is also overflowing in many thanksgivings to God. By their approval of this service, they will glorify God because of your submission flowing from your confession of the gospel of Christ, and the generosity of your contribution for them and for all others, while they long for you and pray for you, because of the surpassing grace of God upon you. Thanks be to God for His inexpressible gift! <sup>(ESV)</sup>

**In Christ Jesus, the Giver of all good things, dear fellow redeemed:**

As more and more of the Jews were converted by the Gospel of Jesus' death and resurrection, the Holy Spirit moved these new Christians to acts of kindness and generosity. Luke writes that *"There was not a needy person among them, for as many as were owners of lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold and laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need"* (Ac. 4:34-35). But then a great famine fell on the land, and those generous Christians now found themselves in need. Their fellow believers from the cities and territories visited by the apostles resolved to take up an offering for them (Ac. 11:29-30). What may have come as a surprise to the Jews of Judea is that much of this financial aid came from the hands of the Gentiles, from those whom they may have formerly shunned and despised.

The Apostle Paul said about the churches of Macedonia, that the people in *"their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part. For they gave according to their means, as I can testify, and beyond their means, of their own accord, begging us earnestly for the favor of taking part in the relief of the saints"* (2Cor. 8:2-4). They begged earnestly for the favor of giving away what was so valuable to them! I am not entirely sure that this is how we give our offerings - "Please, please, take it off my hands! Oh, and here's some more!" At times it is true that we have to pry our own money out of our hands, so to speak, because there are so many more things we would

like to buy for ourselves (which we can't help but be reminded of at this time of year). But just as much as you and I have failed to give our offerings cheerfully at times, I know you have also made sacrifices like those people of Macedonia did and like Paul encouraged the people of Corinth to do in today's lection.

Your generosity is evident not only in your gifts and donations, but also in the time you have offered to help your neighbor and the words of compassion you have shared with others. You have lent a patient ear to the troubled and a shoulder to cry on for the grieving. You have tended to the sick and assisted the disabled. You have cared for the weakest among us and nurtured the young. You have sacrificed for those around you out of love and have forgiven rather than seek revenge. You have humbled yourself as the least of the Lord's servants and built others up with encouragement and praise.

Some days, some of these words and actions were done purely from a sense of duty. You did what you knew you should even though you may have rather done something else. But other times, you did these things for others *"not reluctantly or under compulsion"* but cheerfully, out of love for the God who loved you first. So it is proper on this Eve/Day of Thanksgiving to give thanks to you, to give thanks for the righteous things you have done for others and for *"abound[ing] in every good work."*

But I know you have not done these kind and generous deeds, so that you could hear a thank you from your pastor. In fact, this thanksgiving directed at you may even make you feel a little uncomfortable. As much as you remember some of the good things you have done, you remember all too well many of the bad things also. You can think of others who are worthy of praise and thanksgiving, but not you. You know and feel deeply that you are a sinner. This is a proper sentiment too. Pride drives us to take credit for our accomplishments, like being thankful at this time for how hard we work and how much we have earned so we can buy nice things. This pride also causes us to pursue what is good and right only if it results in our glory.

For all of our failures and spiritual brokenness, God specializes in turning us into useful instruments for Him. He is like the baker who makes a loaf of bread which can then feed a household. Or like a potter who shapes a jug and then fills it, so that it can quench the thirst of many. God takes you and me, sinners, and turns us into agents of His mercy and grace toward our neighbors. He cleansed us in the waters of Baptism, washing away our sins and clothing us in Christ, and He nourishes and strengthens us with the body and blood of Jesus in His Supper. God is the One who called us out of the darkness of unbelief, and who keeps us in the true faith by the Gospel. And He is also the One who motivates and empowers us to do the good that we do toward others.

Paul makes this point clearly in his letter to the Corinthians. *"God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that... you may abound in every good work."* *"He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness."* *"You will be enriched in every way to be generous in every way."* Just as it is God who gives us all of our temporal goods that we give thanks for, so it is God who makes our good works abound. It is God who supplies the seed for our sowing. It is God who increases the harvest of our righteousness. It is God who enriches us to be generous. This is why Paul told the Corinthians

that their service will not result in thanksgivings toward them, as much as it will result in thanksgiving toward God.

You would surely agree that this is how it should be. God awakened us from our spiritual death by His Word of salvation. He forgives us daily for our poor stewardship of His gifts, for our stinginess, and for our tendency to thank and praise ourselves instead of Him. He fills us with the righteousness of our Lord, so that we lack nothing before Him. He has given us such abundant spiritual and physical blessings, that we have more than enough to offer others who are hurting or poor or weak or in pain. Paul says that they will glorify God when they hear us confess the Gospel of Christ and when they see our generosity. This is what Jesus talked about in His "Sermon on the Mount" when He said, *"let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven"* (Mt. 5:16).

**Our Confession and Contributions Produce Thanksgivings to God.** These things produce thanksgivings not just from those we help, but thanksgivings from within ourselves. We know that we have deserved nothing good from God. We know what we have earned by our sins. But by His grace God has given us the full riches of our Lord Jesus Christ. He made Himself poor so that we would be rich (2Cor. 8:9). On top of these spiritual blessings, He also gives all of our earthly blessings—family, food, house, possessions, and so much more. Through God's grace and generosity, we have what Paul described as: *"all sufficiency in all things at all times."* *"Thanks be to God for His inexpressible gift!"* Amen.

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