**Thanksgiving Sunday**

**October 8, 2017**

**“Giving and Thanksgiving” (2 Corinthians 9:6-15)**

**1. Introduction: *Giving Thanks***

On this Thanksgiving Sunday and everyday we strive to live out Paul’s words in 1 Thessalonians 5:18, “No matter what happens, always be thankful, for this is God’s will for you who belong to Christ Jesus.” I found this little anecdote in my sermon illustration files this week and it nicely illustrates Paul’s point.

Dr. Alexander Whyte of Edinburgh was famous for his pastoral prayers since he always managed to find something to thank God for, even in bad times. One very stormy morning one member of his congregation thought to himself, “Looks like the preacher will have nothing to thank God for on a miserable morning like this!” But Whyte stood up and began to pray, “We thank Thee, O God, that it is not always like this.”

For most of us, giving thanks to God comes naturally. We wake up in the morning, thankful for a new day. At every meal, we pause and say a prayer of thanksgiving. When we walk through our neighbourhoods, we thank God for the beauty of creation, especially the fall colours of the trees. On Thanksgiving weekend, we give thanks to God for the many ways that he has blessed us. The bountiful harvest is a reminder of God’s provision. So, as we sit down to our Thanksgiving meals, either today or tomorrow, remember to pause and say thank you to God.

This morning’s Epistle lesson from 2 Corinthians 9 looks at thanksgiving from a slightly different angle. Paul’s words to the Corinthian Christians challenge us to express our *thanksgiving* to God by *giving* to others, especially to those in need. This passage of Scripture teaches us that our generosity to others springs from our gratitude to God and it will result in additional expressions of thanksgiving to God. So, *giving* and *thanksgiving* go together.

**2. Paul’s Mission and the Collection for the Saints**

Paul’s words in 2 Corinthians 9 are part of a much larger story in the life and mission work of the apostle. At the beginning of the chapter Paul refers to “this gift for the Christians in Jerusalem” or as some translations read, “the ministry to the saints” (9:1). This “ministry to the saints” was financial offering from Gentile Christians to Jewish Christians. Paul and his co-workers collected these contributions from the various churches of the Gentile mission with the intent of giving them to the poor among the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem (1 Corinthians 16:1-4). Along with his proclamation of the Gospel, the collection for the saints was an important part of his missionary endeavors.

In Galatians 2:7-10 Paul tells the story of when he met with the leaders in the Jerusalem church and they recognized that “God has given me the responsibility of preaching the Good News to the Gentiles” (2:7) and they encouraged him to keep on preaching (2:9). They also urged him “to remember to help the poor,” which Paul was eager to do (2:10). This challenge to *remember the poor* became one of the key aspects of Paul’s missionary work. Not only did he view it as an act of charity, he also saw it as a tangible expression of the unity between the Jewish and Gentile factions of the early Christian church. In Romans 15:25-27, Paul writes, “At present, however, I am going to Jerusalem with aid for the saints. For Macedonia and Achaia have been pleased to make some contribution for the poor among the saints at Jerusalem; they were pleased to do it, and indeed they are in debt to them, for if the Gentiles have come to share in their spiritual blessings, they ought also to be of service to them in material blessings.”

For Paul, the collection for the saints was a visible expression of gratitude to the Jewish-Christians at Jerusalem, which he hoped would pave the way for a greater unity between the Jewish and Gentile wings of the church. This explains why he was so passionate about its success. One gets a sense of his passionate dedication to this project when reading 2 Corinthians 8 and 9. In these two chapters he encourages with the Corinthian Christians to complete this project with the same enthusiasm with which they began it (8:10-11). In the section prior to this morning’s Epistle lesson, Paul tells the Corinthians of his plans to send an advance team of workers to ensure that the collection is ready when he arrives to avoid potential embarrassment if whole thing falls through (2 Cor. 9:3-4). This move was also intended to ensure that the Corinthians’ contribution was voluntary rather than coerced. In Paul’s words, “I want it to be a willing gift, not one given under pressure” (2 Cor. 9:5).

**3. Our Attitude to Giving**

In the words that follow, Paul stresses that our perspective on giving to others should be shaped by three, related factors: our attitude to giving; the character of God as the supreme giver; and the ultimate results of our giving. To foster a healthy perspective on giving, one needs to keep all these things in mind.

In verses 6 and 7 Paul describes a proper attitude or approach to charitable giving, which are best summarized by biblical commentator R.V. G. Tasker, who wrote, “Giving must be free and deliberate, not compulsory or casual” (*2 Corinthians,* p. 126). Paul begins with an agricultural proverb about planting and harvesting which challenges us to become generous givers whose offering will yield abundant results. Paul is saying that what is true on the farm is also true in the work of the kingdom - a stingy planter gets a stingy crop; a lavish planter gets a lavish crop. When we give to help others, we are not throwing away seed to the wind, but we are sowing seed with the expectation of a rich harvest, with good results. Ralph Martin summarizes this idea in this way, “the fruits of generous giving are as productive and sure as the fruits of the earth in the season of good harvest” (*2 Corinthians,* p. 295). May the tokens of the harvest decorating our church be a reminder of the potential that our humble offerings have when they are placed in God’s hands.

Our approach to giving must also be reflective and thoughtful. Earlier in the passage Paul expressed that he wanted to give the Corinthian congregation time to organize their contribution so the response would be voluntary, rather than forced (9:5). Reflecting on this idea, Paul advises each member of the congregation to make up their own mind how much they should give (9:7). Thus, the correct approach to giving must allow for thoughtful and prayerful action. Whenever a need arises, time must be given for each one of us to consider how we might be involved. By not giving enough time for people to think it over, the response may not be one of willing generosity, but “reluctant or in response to pressure” (9:7).

**4. God is the Supreme Giver**

**5. The Results of Giving**