

"Giving"

Text: 2 Corinthians 6:1-13

Grace, mercy and peace be multiplied to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Dear Fellow Ambassadors of the One True God:

I would imagine that in every society since the fall into sin there have always been givers and takers. Ours is obviously no different. The disturbing part is that the number of takers is growing exponentially and far outpacing the givers. We're not just talking tax payers here; we're talking about nearly every area of our secular existence. Every society can be divided into those who pull the wagon and those who ride on it. There are, of course, those who are entitled to ride – the very young, the very old, the injured, the sick, the handicapped, etc. Everyone understands that. The problem is that riding on the wagon when you are not entitled to do so has somehow lost its well-deserved shame. Expecting others to pay the bills, do the work, and feed you has turned into an industry unto itself, despite its inherent shame. No society, no country that continues down such a path can ever hope to survive.

As we would expect, any problem in secular society will always worm its way into the spiritual. While we find no exception here, there are special circumstances that make this whole topic rather unusual. The first problem is that the Christian faith, and the gospel itself, is centered on the single greatest "something for nothing" in human existence. Here it really is true that those who don't try to earn their own way into heaven are infinitely better off than those who do. In Christianity, we really do live off of the efforts of another, Jesus Christ, and the work he did in paying the debt we owed for our countless sins. This we know as "the grace of God" – the undeserved love he showed to all mankind by sending his Son to do the work that no man would or could do.

Those who reject this undeserved charity from our God and try to pay their own sin-debt will not only fail to do so, they will earn damnation for themselves in the process.

Yet while faith alone in Jesus Christ saves, such faith is never alone. A living faith always produces fruit, and since our text for this morning speaks not to unbelievers but to believers, it speaks also therefore to each one of us here this morning about such fruit, but probably not in the way you are anticipating. Hear then this message from our God as spoken to you, though first recorded in Paul's Second Letter to the Corinthians, the Sixth Chapter:

^{ESV} **2 Corinthians 6:1-13** *Working together with him, then, we appeal to you not to receive the grace of God in vain. ² For he says, "In a favorable time I listened to you, and in a day of salvation I have helped you." Behold, now is the favorable time; behold, now is the day of salvation. ³ We put no obstacle in anyone's way, so that no fault may be found with our ministry, ⁴ but as servants of God we commend ourselves in every way: by great endurance, in afflictions, hardships, calamities, ⁵ beatings, imprisonments, riots, labors, sleepless nights, hunger; ⁶ by purity, knowledge, patience, kindness, the Holy Spirit, genuine love; ⁷ by truthful speech, and the power of God; with the weapons of righteousness for the right hand and for the left; ⁸ through honor and dishonor, through slander and praise. We are treated as impostors, and yet are true; ⁹ as unknown, and yet well known; as dying, and behold, we live; as punished, and yet not killed; ¹⁰ as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, yet possessing everything. ¹¹ ¶ We have spoken freely to you, Corinthians; our heart is wide open. ¹² You are not restricted by us, but you are restricted in your own affections. ¹³ In return (I speak as to children) widen your hearts also.*

So far the Word of our God. In a broken world full of lies and hypocrisy, this really is our only trustworthy guide. Only God's Word can show us the path to heaven. Only God's Word can teach us which of our actions are God-pleasing and which are not. Only God's Word can therefore offer true peace and comfort. That our God would so bless our study of these holy, perfect, inspired words this morning, so we pray, "**Sanctify us by your truth, O Lord. Your word is truth.**" Amen.

It actually didn't dawn on me until after I had studied through this text and assigned the title that most would probably read it and immediately assume that we were going to talk about offerings. We're not, but the fact that our minds tend to go there is informative. This morning our text takes us to a different kind of "give" or "giving."

We begin with a question: *Who is the most generous, giving person that you know?* The first thing we want to get straight is that that is actually two different questions. "Generous" and "giving" can actually be two different things.

I once worked for a man while I was going to college who would routinely give me all sorts of stuff, but he was anything but generous. He owned an office supply store and would routinely load me down with stuff like calendars that were just about to expire and merchandize that none of his customers would ever buy. And there was always an angle, a hook. He

gave to make me feel obligated. *"Since I gave you all that stuff, maybe you wouldn't mind clocking out and then sweeping the warehouse before you go home."*

You all know people like that. There's very little true generosity in their giving. The worst, of course, is the devil himself. Satan is more than happy to give, but always with his final end-game in mind. You will recall how he offered Jesus himself "all the kingdoms of the world" – together with all their glory – with only one small catch: Jesus had to worship Satan, and thereby condemn himself and all of creation to an eternity in hell.

Generosity, on the other hand, refers to selfless giving; giving when there is nothing in it for you – no ulterior motives. Generosity means giving to give, not giving to get. Obviously the greatest, purest example here is our Savior. To this end it is always a worthwhile use of our time to revisit the question of why Jesus did what he did. He lacked nothing in heaven and personally had nothing to gain by leaving heaven. That means that there was absolutely nothing in coming to earth to pay our sin-debt that benefitted anyone but the sinful, rebellious human beings that Jesus came to rescue.

Nor did Jesus come to give "something" of himself. He came to give *all*. Every waking moment he was all about us. Every ounce of energy was devoted to the salvation of sinners. When he thought he could give no more, he gave more. When he neared the point of human exhaustion, he pushed forward and did more. When he suffered as no man in human history ever had, he willingly suffered more.

Ungrateful and frivolous creatures that we are, it is so easy for those of us who now have it so good to minimize and take for granted what Jesus did for us. Why did he just keep giving? Two reasons: love and need; that is, love for mankind and our desperate need. Never his own. Never love for self and never because he needed anything.

This is what "grace" is all about, grace defined as "undeserved love for sinful mankind." In contemplating grace, and as a reaction to all that Jesus did, Paul in our text said simply: ***"We appeal to you not to receive the grace of God in vain."*** Note well his point here. The question is not whether or not we have received or benefitted from Jesus' selfless actions. Every man, woman, and child who has ever been born has so benefitted. Every single one of us has been given the priceless gift of God's grace in Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ has already paid the debt owned for every single sin, yet man still has the power to despise that gift, to reject and refuse it in unbelief.

The devil would love for us to refuse God's grace as some sort of noble act. He would love for us to imagine that just as good people today struggle to pull their own weight and earn their own daily bread, so also

good people don't rely on anyone else to pay for the evil they themselves have done.

While that doesn't sound so bad to conscientious, hard-working folk, the problem goes back to giving. Not only do sinners have nothing to give to God to pay for even one sin, they have the added problem that there is just no *give* is the law. God's demands were not and are not flexible or yielding. They are rigid, fixed, and non-negotiable. They are simply stated but quite literally impossible for the fallen to fulfill: ***"Be holy, as I the Lord your God am holy."*** Again from James 2: ***"For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become accountable for (guilty of) all of it."***

Two experiences during our time in Florida helped to identify both what God's Law is and what it is not. The first was the only moving vehicle accident in which I have ever been involved. Unfamiliar with either hydroplaning or the dynamics of small pickup trucks, I was merrily driving with my brother-in-law after a Florida rainfall when my pickup hydroplaned and I found myself travelling backwards down the highway. Same speed, same direction, just backwards. My little S-10, with a mind of its own, proceeded down the slick grassy ditch and backwards into a barbed wire fence. All-in-all it was the most gentle accident imaginable as the staples and clips on the fence progressively gave way, bringing the vehicle to the most gentle of stops – undamaged but for a few scratches from the wire. That's what God Law is not – gentle, soft, agreeable.

The other example was when we built the new parsonage and installed ceramic tile over the slab-on-concrete floor. Absolutely everything that we ever dropped on that floor exploded into a million pieces. "Unbreakable" Corelle dishes shattered on impact. Drop something on that floor and you may as well say goodbye on the way down.

That's the law. There is no give whatsoever – nothing gentle, no yielding or compromise. Those that run into or break God's Law are spiritually shattered and have no hope of personal reconstruction. This we absolutely need to acknowledge if the gospel is to mean what it should to us, because that's exactly where all of us were (and would be still) apart from Jesus Christ. Our actions shattered us beyond human repair. Picture a plate in thousands of near microscopic shards and that doesn't even begin to compare to how thoroughly we had broken ourselves by our sin-riddled fall against God's holy law.

How silly it must look to God when man tries by his own "giving" to put his own sin-shattered life back together. How insulting to Jesus Christ to even try. Why would Jesus have given what he did if man could do it himself, on his own?

Recognizing what his Savior had done for him, Paul dedicated his life as a proper response. In a word, he *gave*. Hear again how he put it in our text: ***We put no obstacle in anyone's way, so that no fault may be found with our ministry, ⁴ but as servants of God we commend ourselves in every way: by great endurance, in afflictions, hardships, calamities, ⁵ beatings, imprisonments, riots, labors, sleepless nights, hunger; ⁶ by purity, knowledge, patience, kindness, the Holy Spirit, genuine love; ⁷ by truthful speech, and the power of God; with the weapons of righteousness for the right hand and for the left; ⁸ through honor and dishonor, through slander and praise. We are treated as impostors, and yet are true; ⁹ as unknown, and yet well known; as dying, and behold, we live; as punished, and yet not killed; ¹⁰ as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, yet possessing everything.***
¹¹ ¶ ***We have spoken freely to you, Corinthians; our heart is wide open.***

What a fitting, Christian response and what a fine, timeless example. Yet how ashamed I am when I look at my own life and my own selfishness. More often than not I respond to Christ's selfless giving with selfishness, love of self and love of pleasure. Any "giving" of myself is routinely tainted with grumbling and irritability. With appalling consistency I look at life not as what I can do for my God and my neighbor, but in terms of what's in it for me. To me, as to the Corinthians, Paul speaks when he says, ***"You are not restricted by us, but you are restricted in your own affections."***

So then this morning we ask something very simple of our God – simple, but by no means easy. We ask simply that he create in each of us a spirit of true, joyful, selfless giving – a spirit that doesn't ask *"What's in it for me?"* but *"How can I thank my Lord and serve my neighbor with all that I have and all that I do?"* We ask, in short, that the same God who has saved us will also now open our hearts to the sort of selfless love that should naturally be found in each of us – that he would make us "giving" people.

We have far to go to get to the place where our Savior wants to find us, but what a comfort to know that the same one who has already put our sin-shattered lives back together here offers us all the divine intervention

that we need. It's there for the asking. God grant us hearts that actually *desire* what he wants for us. Amen.

Scripture Readings

^{ESV} **Job 38:1-11** Then the LORD answered Job out of the whirlwind and said: ² "Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge? ³ Dress for action like a man; I will question you, and you make it known to me. ⁴ "Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Tell me, if you have understanding. ⁵ Who determined its measurements--surely you know! Or who stretched the line upon it? ⁶ On what were its bases sunk, or who laid its cornerstone, ⁷ when the morning stars sang together and all the sons of God shouted for joy? ⁸ "Or who shut in the sea with doors when it burst out from the womb, ⁹ when I made clouds its garment and thick darkness its swaddling band, ¹⁰ and prescribed limits for it and set bars and doors, ¹¹ and said, 'Thus far shall you come, and no farther, and here shall your proud waves be stayed'?"

^{ESV} **Mark 4:35-41** On that day, when evening had come, he said to them, "Let us go across to the other side." ³⁶ And leaving the crowd, they took him with them in the boat, just as he was. And other boats were with him. ³⁷ And a great windstorm arose, and the waves were breaking into the boat, so that the boat was already filling. ³⁸ But he was in the stern, asleep on the cushion. And they woke him and said to him, "Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?" ³⁹ And he awoke and rebuked the wind and said to the sea, "Peace! Be still!" And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm. ⁴⁰ He said to them, "Why are you so afraid? Have you still no faith?" ⁴¹ And they were filled with great fear and said to one another, "Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?"

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Fourth Sunday after Pentecost – June 21, 2015

The Opening Prayer by the Pastor

The Opening Hymn – 281 (Red Hymnal)

"The Savior Calls"

The Order of Service – Supplement page 12ff. (Brown Hymnal)

The Scripture Lessons: (Printed on the back page of this bulletin)

The Old Testament Lesson: (Job 38:1-11) Even in the midst of great suffering Job had no right to question his God. This tends to run contrary to our idea of "fair." It is a lesson that we therefore need to hear, learn, and remember. It is never the right time for man to question God, or, for that matter, to object to what our loving God allows to happen to us. At all times we are to recognize his ways as higher than ours, along with the divine love that he always has for us.

Psalm 38 (Supplement page 39) (Brown Hymnal)

The Gospel Lesson: (Mark 4:35-41) What a question the disciples asked Jesus in our second reading: **"Teacher, don't you care?"** This they asked of the very One who gave up *all* for *others* – for you and me. Remember this lesson, for you and I are also tempted to ask the same question of our Lord when things don't go as planned in our lives. At those times in particular we need to remind ourselves that the One who gave all to us in purest love, still cares just as much now as he did then for our eternal well-being.

The Confession of Faith -

The Apostolic Creed – page 15 (Brown Hymnal)

The Pre-Sermon Hymn – 289 (Red Hymnal)

"The Law Commands and Makes Us Know"

The Sermon – Text: 2 Corinthians 6:1-13 (Printed on the back page of this bulletin)

"Giving"

The Offertory – (Supplement page 16 insert)

The Post-Sermon Hymn - 441 (Red Hymnal)

"We Give Thee But Thine Own"

The Offering

The Prayer followed by the Lord's Prayer

The Benediction

The Closing Hymn -465 (Verses 1&4) (Red Hymnal)

"Christ Is Our Cornerstone"

Silent Prayer

Welcome! - We warmly welcome any visitors who might be with us this morning and invite you to join us every Sunday at this time. St. Paul is a congregation in fellowship with the Church of the Lutheran Confession (CLC) – a conservative Lutheran synod with churches and missions throughout the United States, as well as Canada, India, and Africa. We are glad you are here. Thank you for letting us share the Word of God with you. Please record your visit in our Guest Book, and come again!

Attendance - Last Sunday (47) Average (52)

This Week at St. Paul:

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| Today | -10:00 a.m. | – Worship Service |
| | -11:00 a.m. | – Coffee/Fellowship Time |
| Tuesday | -7:00 p.m. | – Church Council Meeting |
| Next Sunday | -10:00 a.m. | – Sunday Worship w/communion |
| | -11:15 a.m. | – Coffee/Fellowship Time |

CLC News – Michael Schierenbeck is considering the call to Faith of Markesan. The CLC General Pastoral Conference was held this past week in Eau Claire. Papers delivered at the Conference are available from the Pastor. Seminary Graduate Rob Sauers is scheduled to be installed today as Pastor of Bethel in Morris, MN.

Storm Damage – Members please let the congregation know if you have storm damage and need help with the cleanup.

Church Council Meeting – Council Members please note the meeting scheduled for this Tuesday at 7 pm.

Father's Day – Though not a "sacred" holiday, fatherhood is certainly something that all Christian fathers should take very seriously and something all Christians should celebrate. Fathers are called by God himself to exercise headship in their homes. Being the "head" should not be confused with being the boss. Christian headship is correctly exercised by self-sacrifice and by providing not only discipline but an honorable example. Dads are called by their Lord to place the needs and wellbeing of both wife and children above their own. The example that God gives us in his Word is Jesus Christ and his relationship with the Church. It was Jesus who came not to be served but to serve, and to "give his life as a ransom."