Proper 12 – Pentecost Year B

July 28, 2024

Pastor Jasper Sellnow

Theme: God Gives Gracious Gifts

*To you*

*Through you*

Text: 2 Corinthians 9:8-11

**8And God is able to bless you abundantly, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work. 9As it is written:**

**“They have freely scattered their gifts to the poor;**

**their righteousness endures forever.”**

**10Now he who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will also supply and increase your store of seed and will enlarge the harvest of your righteousness. 11You will be enriched in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God.**

The Word of God we’ll consider today is our reading from 2 Corinthians. Let’s begin with prayer:

*Gracious God, you send great blessings new each morning all our days. For your mercy never ending, for your love we offer praise. Lord, we pray that we, your people who your gifts unnumbered claim, through the sharing of your blessings may bring glory to your name. Amen.*

*(Christian Worship Hymn 752 stz. 1)*

Why does God give gracious gifts to his people? How could we answer that question? Well, I suppose we could say God gives gracious gifts because… God is good… because God loves us… because we need them… because he promises to care for us. All of those things are true, but they fail to include one important point that we see in God’s Word before us today. God gives gracious gifts to his people not only so that we can know his goodness, love, and care for ourselves… but so that through us others might know it too. Yes ***God gives gracious gifts to you…*** but he also ***gives gracious gifts through you.***

Think about the three readings from God’s Word we heard today. In our first reading God gave the gracious gift of food to his people Israel as they traveled through a deserted land on their way to their new home in the Promised Land. Yes God did this because he was good, and loving, and cared about them… he didn’t want them to starve. But he also did this so that they would be able to provide others with what they needed to know God’s goodness and love. Israel was meant to be God’s mouthpiece of salvation to the world. By sparing their lives and feeding their bodies, God preserved a people who would not just be his own holy nation, but would be proclaimers of the coming Savior to a world in need.

Or consider our Gospel reading today. Jesus told the disciples to provide food for the thousands people in need. They should have immediately asked Jesus for help with such a difficult task, surely if he asked them to feed them he would provide what was needed to do such a thing. But they seemed to miss that point, and so Jesus had to teach them. He provided food miraculously, just as he had in the wilderness for ancient Israel, and he gave it to the disciples who passed it out to those in need, providing both for a physical hunger, and demonstrating that he is the Savior God who meets every need of body and soul.

St. Paul’s letter to the Corinthians that is in front of us for our sermon also gives us a snapshot of God’s gracious gifts to and through his people. One of the reasons Paul wrote this second letter to this Christian church in Corinth was to encourage them to finish a collection of money that would be gathered from them and taken to the poor in Jerusalem. You see, when Paul was sent out by the church in Jerusalem, he was encouraged to not only bring the gospel to these various places throughout the Roman world, but to bring back an offering from these churches to help the impoverished believers back in Jerusalem.

You can see the beauty of such a mission. Those in desperate need of the truth about Jesus would hear it because a poor band of believers back in Israel sent out missionaries to share the treasures of God’s grace with the Gentiles. And in response to God’s grace these new Gentile believers would have an opportunity to demonstrate their faith and provide for the needs of those who had been so good to them in their spiritual needs. And of course in the end, God will be praised for all of it, as Paul describes in the closing verse of our text: **You will be enriched in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God.**

In all of these sections of Scripture today we see God giving gracious gifts to and through his people. This helps us to broaden our own understanding of what God has given to us, how he gives such blessings, and why he gives them. It is for our good to be sure, but not for ours alone! God always intends his good gifts to his people to be shared – multiplied much like Christ miraculously multiplies the loaves and fish – God gives gracious gifts so that he can miraculously multiply such blessings as they overflow into the hearts and lives of others.

So how should we think about such things? Well, let’s consider both what God has given us, and what he wants to give through us to others… first consider the term ***gracious gift***. That is what God gives to us. What he gives is a gift. Not earned. Not bought. Not bartered. No, it is a gift – something freely given. And it is ***gracious***, that is, it is something we are given with no strings attached… something given even though we don’t deserve it. All of God’s gifts comes to us this way.

Consider his best gifts. Scripture tells us **in him we live and move and have our being (Acts 17:28).** Our very lives are gracious gifts from God’s hand. And he didn’t just give us life, he redeemed that life from certain eternal death by giving us the most precious thing he had. St. Peter writes: **it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your ancestors, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect (1 Peter 1:18-19).**

God did not look into your heart and find something good and worthy before he decided to give you his Son. No, your sin, your greed, your selfishness, all your wickedness and mine – they made us God’s enemies! We were nothing more than dirty rotten sinners in God’s sight. And yet, as Paul wrote in Romans: **God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us (Romans 5:8).** This is a gracious gift indeed! No merit of ours. No strings attached. Christ died for the sins of the world. Christ died for you. And now through faith – a faith that God himself worked in your heart – this forgiveness is your very own and means heaven is wide open to you.

And as if Christ crucified and risen for you, and the faith that believes it… as if these gifts were not enough… God gives even more. He strengthens faith through his Word proclaimed and his Supper offered. He encourages hearts that are downtrodden and sad with comfort and hope. He clothes our bodies, feeds our stomachs, gives us companions and counselors and careers. But remember how he gives such gifts? Through other believers! Parents and pastors and teachers who share the Word with you… Christian family and friends that point you to God’s promises in your hour of need. The many people who have spent of their time and money and effort to feed and clothe you and give you friendship you often don’t really deserve! God gives gracious gifts to you, but he does it by working through the people he has placed all around you.

And now, in turn, God intends to do for others what he has done for you… and to work through you to bring such gifts to those in need. Listen again as St. Paul describes this in our sermon text: **God is able to bless you abundantly, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work. As it is written: “They have freely scattered their gifts to the poor; their righteousness endures forever.”**

Paul is saying that God gives all we need, so that we can live righteous lives – lives of faith – that share with those in need as we do good deeds out of thanks for all God has done for us and given us. That’s why Paul quotes Psalm 112 there in our text. That is a Psalm all about the believer’s response to God’s grace. The believer freely shares his gifts because he knows the grace of God. And such deeds of faith **endure forever**, God says, they don’t merit salvation of course – only Christ’s deeds did that… but they glorify God and serve as a witness to the faith he’s given us and the love he’s shown us. Such deeds are precious in God’s sight, even if they might not look all that amazing to others.

Think of all the ways this plays out in your life… God gives you faith in Jesus not just so that you can know forgiveness and be in heaven one day, but so that others too would hear such marvelous good news and share in God’s gracious gifts through your witness. You do this when you bring your children to be baptized, when you teach your children to pray before meals and before going to bed. You do this when you read a devotion after dinner with your family. You do this when you invite a friend to church… when you write a Bible verse in a card and send it to a friend in need… when you place a joyful offering in the basket at church or thoughtfully plan out your gifts at home to give online for gospel ministry…. And as you do all these simple things, God gives gracious gifts through you to the people all around you. And God is glorified in this!

The same is true of all the physical gifts God gives through us. The trip to the store is not mundane, it is God’s provision for your family through your careful stewardship and planning. The hours at work are not a meaningless grind, they are God’s gift to your family, community, and church as you serve others by providing for their needs. Things we often give little thought or care to, like paying taxes, holding the door, picking up a dirty room even it wasn’t our mess. All such things become sanctified and special in the sight of our God who uses us to give those around us the things they need for body and life… for soul and spirit… for time and for eternity.

Why does God give gracious gifts to his people? So that we and those we serve might know God’s goodness, receive his grace, and find every need met by the one who loved us enough to give us Jesus. Keep such thoughts in mind as you consider the many gifts God has given to you… and the many ways God intends to offer his gracious gifts through you. Amen.

**God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus. Amen. Philippians 4:19**