

Psalm 33:18 (NRSV)

¹⁸ Truly the eye of the LORD is on those who fear [God],
on those who hope in [God's] steadfast love,

2 Corinthians 8:1-9 (NRSV)

Encouragement to Be Generous

8 We want you to know, brothers and sisters,^[a] about the grace of God that has been granted to the churches of Macedonia; ²for during a severe ordeal of affliction, their abundant joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part. ³For, as I can testify, they voluntarily gave according to their means, and even beyond their means, ⁴begging us earnestly for the privilege^[b] of sharing in this ministry to the saints— ⁵and this, not merely as we expected; they gave themselves first to the Lord and, by the will of God, to us, ⁶so that we might urge Titus that, as he had already made a beginning, so he should also complete this generous undertaking^[c] among you. ⁷Now as you excel in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in utmost eagerness, and in our love for you^[d]—so we want you to excel also in this generous undertaking.^[e]

⁸I do not say this as a command, but I am testing the genuineness of your love against the earnestness of others. ⁹For you know the generous act^[f] of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich.



A Future with Hope

20th Century comedian, Flip Wilson, used to tell a story about a preacher who was trying to motivate his congregation to be more enthusiastic about their church and to be more generous givers. The preacher said in his sermon: “If this church is going to get anywhere, it has to learn to crawl.” The congregation responded, “Let it crawl, Rev., let it crawl!”

Then he said, “And after it learns to crawl, it has to learn to walk.” And the people said, “Let it walk, Rev., let it walk!” The preacher got excited by the congregation’s engagement and continued, “After this church learns to walk, it has to learn to run!” The people shouted back, “Let it run, Rev., let it run!”

Then he exclaimed, “And if this church is going to run, it’s going to take money!” And the people said, “Let it crawl, Rev., let it crawl!” We like the idea of being an enthusiastic people of faith making an impact within the community and world. But too

many times, when we find out that there's a cost that comes with that idea, we need to determine just how much we really want to "run, Rev., let it run!"

In today's scripture text, Paul was trying to motivate and inspire the Corinthians church to be generous givers. They had made a commitment to help to care for the poor, the orphans, and the widows in Israel, but they had not followed through with providing the funds. So Paul decides to point out the positive side of giving -- **the joy of generosity!**

It has been speculated that the Corinthians were like many of us and most human beings. It was a whole lot easier to talk about the many ways they could help the less fortunate in Israel. They made big promises. But when it came time to fulfill those promises, it just seemed easier to skip over them. They probably had all kinds of perfectly reasonable excuses!

Now, Paul could have heaped guilt and shame on the Corinthians for not keeping their promise. But instead, he decided to inspire them by sharing with them the story of the church of Macedonia. Paul told them that although the church in Macedonia had experienced hardship, devastation, discrimination, and oppression, they still gave generously, motivated by faith and love. No external circumstances were so bad that they could not share generously what they had.

You know, sometimes we hear these stories from back in the first century, and we think, "Well that was all well and good for them, but things are different today!" This very week, friends, I heard about the faith, love, and generosity of St. Andrew U.M.C., and I was proud to be a UM follower of Jesus. Here is their story: **[VIDEO from CBS News]**

<https://www.cbsnews.com/search/?q=dozens+sheltering+in+church>

Did you notice....that the day after Hurricane Michael crumbled their building, St. Andrews UMC set up tables in the parking lot to provide needed food and supplies to their community!! The Word of God survived not only in their beloved Bible, but also as shown through the generous giving, through the helping hands of the congregation, many of whom had no homes to return to themselves. After all they had been through, they had every good excuse NOT to give. But like the Macedonians of old, God gave them the courage and compassion, in spite of their circumstances, to step out on faith and give!

Getting back to our text: Paul goes on to exclaim that the Macedonian church was so enthusiastic that they begged insistently for the privilege of sharing in the ministry of the saints. These Christians were desperately poor, because many of them had lost their jobs, their livelihood, due to their professed faith in Christ. And yet they were eager to give. That's the kind of enthusiasm that Jesus provides. In faith, Christ takes us from wherever

we are and gives us hope. Jesus takes people who are broken and enables them to bring healing into the lives of others. That is the joy of giving! It is even more fun than giving more quarters than necessary to the children so that they can buy the gift bags that I also provided. It is such fun because it is a sharing of the JOY, the LOVE, and the BLESSINGS entrusted to us by God, **that another might know they are loved and have hope in Christ** as well.

I invite you to seize this opportunity to equip Kenmore United Methodist Church to crawl, and walk, and run with Christ, supplied with every resource necessary to build a ***future with hope*** for all to whom Christ sends us. Let's make the pledge together....today!