

**2 Corinthians 8:1-9, 13-15**  
**"First to the Lord"**  
**Sixth Sunday after Pentecost**

**July 1, 2018**  
**First Lutheran Church, Glencoe, Minn.**  
**Pastor Peter Adelsen**

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

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

**[Intro]**

***"For in a severe test of affliction, their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part"*** (2 Corinthians 8:2)

Is it hard or easy being a Christian today?

Well, considering what it was like in the first century during the Apostle Paul's time, we would say that being a Christian today is a lot easier, than it was back then.

At least we aren't being used as human torches keeping the streets bright at night as during the reign of Nero. And, Christians aren't being used as entertainment in the Roman Coliseum as they meet their death by a roaring lion. And, Christians aren't forced to give God's Holy Scripture to the authorities for a public burning. And if they didn't give the authorities God's Holy Scripture, the alternative was death.

We aren't to those times, but those times are gradually returning. Now, we aren't seeing Christians as human torches and as entertainment today, but God's Word is under attack. And, I'm not saying that Christians are not under physical persecution. For this is happening in the Middle East and Africa.

You see, persecution of Christians was common during the days of the Apostle Paul. For many things that went wrong in society, the culture easily blamed the Christians – just because they could, because the society had the power to do so.

We may think that it is hard now being a Christian in today's world, but it is nothing like it was back then. But, we are beginning to see the start of persecution, as Christians are being seen as the fringe of today's society.

### ***[Church in Macedonia]***

Paul begins today's epistle commending the Macedonians for their generosity in giving.

For the Macedonian Christians had nothing and yet they wanted to give. These Macedonians were under severe affliction from persecution. Now, we do not know the exact persecution, but we do know that it wasn't pleasant.

On top of all of this, these Macedonians were in the very depths of destitution. They were at the rock bottom of poverty. They had what we would think of as nothing.

And yet, they gave to help the wider Christian church.

For this, Paul wrote to the church in Corinth: ***“For they gave according to their means... and this, not as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then by the will of God to us”*** (2 Corinthians 8:3a, 5)

Paul was shocked!

These Macedonians were contributing more generously than their impoverished state really permitted them. And, they gave without anyone's prompting or pressure. Because, they wanted to give!

Paul did not expect this generosity. What he expected was a smaller amount of money to be given to them. After all, they are in poverty and they did not have much. They could barely put food on the table.

This was certainly self-sacrifice on the part of the Macedonian Christians.

But remember, Paul is not writing to the Macedonians to commend them. He is writing to the Corinthians.

### ***[Church in Corinth]***

The Church in Corinth has had a lot of problems – as we read in First and Second Corinthians. Paul has dealt with them a lot. He's praised them for doing right, and rebuked them when doing wrong.

This time, Paul is not necessarily rebuking the Corinthians, but he's using the Macedonians as an example to them.

For it appears that the Church in Corinth was not giving. They had the money and resources, but they did not want to support the wider church.

Corinth was the complete opposite of Macedonia. Corinth was wealthy and gave nothing. Macedonia was poor and gave everything.

Now, Paul is not promoting a contest between the Macedonians and the Corinthians to see who would be the first in generosity, but he's trying to appeal to the Macedonian example. For they are "begging to give" (2 Corinthians 8:4)!

Paul wrote: ***"I say this not as a command, but to prove by the earnestness of others that your love also is genuine"*** (2 Corinthians 8:8).

And, this example may have embarrassed many in Corinth. For the Macedonians were giving sacrificially, while the Corinthians were not. And, where was their heart? Was it to the Lord, or toward themselves?

***[Macedonian or Corinthian?]***

Even today, the giving of time, talents and treasure is an issue in Christ's Church. Even though Paul's letter was written in the first century, it certainly shows how things have not changed.

Yes, there are those who give sacrificially, like the Macedonians, but at the same time there are those who don't, like the Corinthians.

So, I ask: Who are you? Are you a Macedonian? Or, are you a Corinthian?

Do you give ***"first to the Lord"*** or first to yourself? Where are your priorities? Is God first in your life? Or is He just another idol among many other idols?

Do you give your time, talents and treasure ***"first to the Lord"***?

Again, what is your priority? Yourself, or God?

Do you care more about your favorite television show than supporting Christ's church? Do you watch your favorite show more faithfully than supporting the church with your time, talents and treasure?

It is so easy to say, "Look what I earned" when you receive your paycheck. But, in reality, your paycheck or social security check is a gift from God. For everything we see and have is a gift from God. These are our "**daily bread**" (Matthew 6:11) as Jesus says in the Lord's Prayer.

And what do you do when you receive a gift? You give thanks.

We typically give thanks when we receive birthday gifts or wedding gifts, so why not give thanks to God?

Again, like Paul wrote to the Corinthians, giving is not a command, but a reflection on who we are. Paul is telling the Corinthians and us today that "**our love should be genuine**" (2 Corinthians 8:8) and so we should have the urge to support the church.

At the same time, there should be limits on giving, as Martin Luther said.

Luther wrote: "God does not want you to give to needy people in such a way that you and yours must also beg and be a burden to other people. He only asks you to give of your abundance, of that which you can spare without harm." (What Luther Says, 1620)

So, don't give to the point where you put yourself in poverty, but give out of your abundance. Again, this is why Paul was amazed at the Macedonians.

*[Christ Gave It All For Us]*

***"For we know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich"*** (2 Corinthians 8:9).

Our Lord Jesus Christ chose to exchange His royal status in heaven for a slave status as a temporary resident on earth. He surrendered it all out of His love for us!

Through His Incarnation, Jesus became the poorest of the poor as He submitted to the Law and fell victim to its curse.

He fell victim, because He wanted to make us rich in the heavenly blessings of forgiveness of sins, salvation and life everlasting.

He came to destroy the power of sin, death and the devil. And in doing so, He gave away His riches so we could become rich.

He did this all by submitting Himself to the destitution on the cross. Although He is the King, he was stripped to only cloths. He was nailed to the cross, so we could be forgiven of our sins of thought, word and deed that *we* have committed against God.

In return for Christ's sacrifice, we receive forgiveness and a share of His eternal Kingdom in heaven.

And we know this to be fact, because Jesus rose to life on Easter Sunday and later bodily ascended into heaven, where He promises to return to judge the living and the dead.

We were all once poor to sin, but now we are rich in Christ's blessings.

Since Christ has sacrificed Himself for us to make us right with God, we in return give Christ thanks in how we now act as Christians. We give thanks by giving ourselves "*first to the Lord.*" Amen.

The peace of God which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.

✠ SOLI DEO GLORIA ✠