

7/1/12 Sermon – 2 Corinthians 8:1-9,13-15
Ascension Lutheran Church, Batavia IL

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

2 Corinthians 8:1–9 (NKJV)

1 Moreover, brethren, we make known to you the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia:

2 that in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded in the riches of their liberality.

3 For I bear witness that according to their ability, yes, and beyond their ability, they were freely willing,

4 imploring us with much urgency that we would receive the gift and the fellowship of the ministering to the saints.

5 And not only as we had hoped, but they first gave themselves to the Lord, and then to us by the will of God.

6 So we urged Titus, that as he had begun, so he would also complete this grace in you as well.

7 But as you abound in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in all diligence, and in your love for us—see that you abound in this grace also.

8 I speak not by commandment, but I am testing the sincerity of your love by the diligence of others.

9 For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich.

2 Corinthians 8:13–15 (NKJV)

13 For I do not mean that others should be eased and you burdened;

14 but by an equality, that now at this time your abundance may supply their lack, that their abundance also may supply your lack—that there may be equality.

15 As it is written, “He who gathered much had nothing left over, and he who gathered little had no lack.”

**G - OD'S
R - ICHES
A - T
C - HRIST'S
E - XPENSE**

Now may He who supplies seed to the sower, and bread for food, supply and multiply the seed you have sown and increase the fruits of your righteousness,
In Jesus name, dear fellow redeemed

With all the talk in the news lately about health care coverage, it is easy to spark up a conversation about our government and politics. It is even easier to spark up an argument. Should our government be involved in health care or not? To what extent?

Well, I am not here to answer those questions. God's word addresses much greater and deeper needs. And He provides answers unlike any other.

Politicians are gearing up for the upcoming election and will likely make this issue a primary portion of their campaigns. However no matter which side of the issue they end up on, they won't be quoting our text to prove their point. You won't hear anyone shouting "if I am elected I will make sure you become poor in order that others might become rich." Such a campaign is doomed from the start. Yet this is exactly the campaign God has waged and won with. God has settled a much greater health care issue: a spiritual health poverty. (v.9) God has led a campaign known as "G-R-A-C-E" – **God's Riches At Christ's Expense.**

1. GRACE among sinners

Political campaigns have and will continue to circle around what you deserve. You will hear, "American's deserve _____ ." What do we deserve as far as God is concerned? Do we deserve the right to life? ... to liberty? ... to happiness? Do we deserve the right to comfortable living, a car, a home, insurance, equal opportunity?

Romans 6:23 (NKJV) – 23 For the wages of sin is death ...

What we have earned from God, our wages is death. The Law of God is a get what you deserve philosophy. Sickness, poverty, oppression, tragedy are only mankind's down payment of what we have earned. If we take a "get what we have coming" approach to God's judgment we receive the right to life only if we earn it. Only if we live according to the ultimate ideal in every thought, word, and deed will we earn right standing before a holy and just God. Anything short of that and we are left in debt. Rich or poor, upper class, middle class, and lower class – we are left in a debt in which we earn what we have coming: eternal poverty, the deepest poverty of hell.

We poor souls have often shown how deprived we are. Maybe you've taken a family vacation recently or are planning one. How are you going to decide what to do or what to see? Who's going to cook? Who's going to clean up? Am I willing to give up more than everyone else to ensure that others are having a good time? Our poor sinful flesh will always want me to have a good time first. Our flesh will always want to be sure everyone else is doing their share. Selfish beggars, we are by nature unwilling to do anything freely, thinking we deserve it all, and always expecting someone to do something for me first. In fact our flesh wants this for our whole life: everything to line up for me first – our poverty.

(v.9) He became "beggarly." Luther called this the Great Exchange. As God in all His glory was infinitely rich, as He sat above all things, as He possessed every comfort and Divine power, He exchanged it all to become a beggar.

As Paul says to the Philippians, “He did not consider equality with God something to be paraded about at all times, but He emptied Himself and took the form of a slave ... He became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross.” (Philippians 2).

The Cross ... something reserved for the worst of criminals. ... At Christ’s Expense ... He had to give far more than we will ever understand or know. Not just a lump sum of sin, but individually, Jesus suffered for your individual sins. He lowered Himself to have your and my selfishness upon Himself. His life was one of a beggar, who gave up all the riches He deserved in order to earn them back for you. As a man He took on that Law of God, to earn what we could never, righteousness and pure holiness.

Romans 8:3 (NKJV) — 3 For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh,

G-R-A-C-E: God’s Riches At Christ’s Expense. We who were poor are now rich. We are rich with forgiveness. We are rich with life which we don’t deserve. That is how grace is defined after all: undeserved love. The undeserved love of God has no strings attached. God’s grace no conditions to be met. It simply gives. It gives faith to believe this. It gives riches that do not perish. In our poverty, GRACE has lifted us to the thrones of heaven.

1 Corinthians 4:8 (NKJV) — 8 You are already full! You are already rich! You have reigned as kings...

Where we deserve death, God has given life. God’s riches have been poured out on us sinners at Christ’s expense.

2. GRACE among the Macedonians

Very often in the political atmosphere there will be references to the needs of the poor. Some believe in taxing the rich to provide for the poor. Yet in our text it is the other way around: (**v.1-3**). The poor are the ones providing.

We read from Acts how Paul and other church leaders were arranging a collection to bring to Jerusalem. In the midst of famine and persecution, the brethren in Jerusalem were suffering greatly. And while the churches of Macedonia were just as in need as anyone, they gave even more. Indeed this is only by GRACE. G-od’s R-iches A-t C-hrist’s E-xpense were poured out on the churches of Macedonia. What ever “great trial of affliction” was pressing upon them, they didn’t let it hinder their love for their brethren.

Paul is arranging the same sort of collection for the church at Corinth. He has already made provisions in his first epistle to the Corinthians, **1 Corinthians 16:1–3 (NKJV) — 1 Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given orders to the churches of Galatia, so you must do also: 2 On the first day of the week let each one of you lay something aside, storing up as he may prosper, that there be no**

collections when I come. 3 And when I come, whomever you approve by your letters I will send to bear your gift to Jerusalem.

Now the Macedonian Christians are set forth as encouragement to the brethren in Corinth to do the same. For they gave beyond their ability. In poverty the Macedonians knew their riches. They knew that their earthly possessions were not really theirs, but belonged to God. By Christ's sacrifice on the cross they were truly rich no matter how few belongings they had. And so Paul writes, v.2, "they abounded in the riches of their single-mindedness." A better translation than "liberality" is "singleness" or "with one mind they abounded in these riches." They were not of two minds about this. But with joy they had one intention: to help. How peculiar that in losing goods, they were actually gaining.

(v.5) Indeed GRACE always starts with God. As we evaluate the needs in our life, as we battle our sinful flesh, we begin by laying bare all our belongings before God. This includes our sins. The Macedonians too laid themselves in the hands of their Lord first as He led them by grace to know His will.

God's Riches were among the churches of Macedonia At Christ's Expense.

3. GRACE among all believers

God's campaign has come right to your home town. In fact it has come even closer. God is proclaiming His campaign right among us now and even within you. He seeks freedom, He seeks equality, He seeks to make His people rich. His GRACE is shared among all believers.

(v.7) Our flesh does not like to share. You might recall seeing two kids tugging back and forth: "its mine ... I had it first." But let's not think just in terms of kids only just because they are more vocal about it. Grown ups too have trouble sharing freely. If we give something, we expect something in return. We just don't have the selfless nature of God though we should. When we were not deserving of the least of all His mercies, He saved us. He freely shared His own Son with us. To the point of death, expecting and demanding nothing in return from us, Jesus gave up His own life. "By His poverty, we have become rich." We are forgiven and now have good reason to share freely. **1 John 3:16 (NKJV) — 16 By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us. And we also ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.**

(v.8) Paul calls upon the Corinthians not by motivation of the law, but by the motivation of GRACE. He does not call upon the Corinthians to contribute to the needs in Jerusalem by constraint, but by a call to faith. As John said, **1 John 3:18 (NKJV) — 18 My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth.**

In the same manner Paul will go on in chapter 9 to say, **2 Corinthians 9:7 (NKJV) — 7 So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver.**

God does not motivate giving by guilt. We should not think of our budget as a command. Neither in the CLC or in our congregation should we use a budget as a way of constraining members to give money. If it was, then I guess we could require a monthly contribution to be withdrawn by direct deposit from your bank account. But the Church is not a business, it is a fellowship. **(v.4)** And fellowship literally means a “sharing.”

That does not mean the budget is without good purpose. It expresses our desire to share in this ministry to the saints. It is a servant of our mission. Our mission is to preach the gospel and support our fellow Christians. The budget helps us to meet those goals and increase them further. The CLC, for instance, at the recent synod convention voted to increase the budget beyond estimated contributions. The Lord has presented us with more opportunities to reach souls who are desperate for the word. We have the opportunity to train over 100 more pastors in the coming years by this increase. We have the opportunity to support an extra district chairman in India to oversee outreach to more lost sheep in need of the Good Shepherd. ILC plans to hire a new IT manager to its technologically understaffed staff.

However we should not measure love by how much you give. Recall the widow who gave only two mites, yet Jesus says, **Mark 12:44 (NKJV) — 44 for they all put in out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty put in all that she had, her whole livelihood.**” Love and giving is a matter left to God’s grace for us and in us. It is something that is not represented by numbers, but is found in the riches of Christ poured out by care for our fellow believers.

V.13-15 describe this as God’s equilibrium. In His grace, He balances the needs of His people and the needs of those in need. We stand on the scales of love as we find them tip here or there in the lives of our people and fellowship. We read of this also in the early church, **Acts 2:44–45 (NKJV) — 44 Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common, 45 and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need.**

(v.15) Paul quotes Exodus 16 where Israel was wandering in the wilderness without a steady supply of food or water. Think of what faith this would require. Yet God provided. Each day God would make manna appear on the ground for the people to eat. Always there was enough, but never was there too much. Some had large families, some small – and yet no one lacked.

And where did that manna come from? Did any of the Israelites have any reason to claim credit, or to claim they deserved more than someone else? Our whole earthly lives are showered with manna – gifts from God to meet the needs of His people. Where one lacks, another shares. This is socialism in its purest ideal – motivated by undeserved love.

Let us ever be sensitive to the needs God presents before us. But may we always do so with God's grace upon us. Yet sometimes we will feel that we are just giving because we have to, or we are in church on Sunday even though we don't want to; yet let us remember that it is grace that has led God to forgive you and me for all our sins, it is grace that has brought us here and it is grace that God is here to give to us. As the hymn writer says, "Grace has a thrilling sound to each believers ear." It is grace that we give to others: GRACE IS God's Riches At Christ's Expense.

Amen.