

## **“Generosity”**

A sermon by the Rev. Frances Savill

Sunday June 27, 2021

2 Corinthians 8:7-15

Overview of 2 Corinthians:

<https://bibleproject.com/explore/video/2-corinthians/>

Many of you know that Mark and I just finished moving from our home in North Bay to what was my parent’s home on Eagle Lake. In 2000 my parents collapsed two homes into our place on Eagle Lake which was already fully furnished.

Downsizing is not particularly easy. So this year when Mark and I had the same task, moving our larger place into a smaller already very fully furnished place, it was a challenge.

My mantra as I went through this was often: “this is not my treasure.” My treasure is safe with the Lord. I sang “Let it go” a lot.

We had and have a lot. Lots of things were a blessing to us and to our family, or to my parents, or grandparents, and it was a challenge to let many things go- so that they could be a blessing to someone else, to some other person or family.

Generosity isn’t easy, even when it is things we don’t really need, and know that it will be good to give them away. There’s this sneaking suspicion in the back of my mind that says; this might be valuable, you should hold on to it, maybe you could sell it and make money, or you are going to need this, this is valuable and you will be less valuable without this stuff...

Greed is easy... generosity of mind and spirit is much more difficult.

The last book study we did was on a book called “Free of Charge” by Miraslov Volf. Volf devotes several chapters of his book to giving describing why we should give, how we should give, and what we should give.

To the question of why we should give, there are a few simple and compelling answers. The first is because giving is one of the characteristics of God. God gives – therefore we should give. God gives us life, health, blessings, the ability to work, and God gives to us so we can pass on God’s gifts to others. We are to learn to be more like God, and so we learn to give gifts also.

You and I bear the name of Christ Jesus our Lord. We are called Christians. Jesus dwells in us and we dwell in him and our lives now are not our own, we’ve been bought with a price.

It’s described in the Bible in lots of ways. The Apostle Paul says that because we have died to our old selves and live as new selves indwelt by Christ, we should take off the old and clothe ourselves with the new. ***The unspoken assumption is that the old self is not quite yet dead and the new self is not yet fully alive.*** Taking off the old and putting on the new is an ongoing process of dying and rising.

Part of what we take off is our selfishness and self-centeredness and we learn to be generous, opening our lives up to God, and to the people around us.

Giving is part of what it means to imitate God, but giving also makes us more fully ourselves and expands who we are rather than diminishing us.

Consider this quote from Volf:

*The self will lose itself if it simply lives in and for itself. It will seek only its own benefits, and the more it seeks its own benefits, the less satisfied it will become.*

*The more you fill the self, the more it echoes with the emptiness of unfulfillment. Living in itself and for itself, the self remains mysteriously unsatisfied and insatiable.*

*The self will be fulfilled only if it draws the living water from the well spring of love's infinity and passes it on to its neighbors.*

*When we do this, we have crossed over from self-centeredness to genuine and fulfilling generosity. P. 52*

In our passage from 2 Corinthians, Paul is encouraging the people to give generously, to remember how they were anxious to give at the beginning and now they needed to complete the work.

There were Christians in need in Jerusalem- they needed these gifts to survive. But Paul also tells the church that they needed to give. Giving helps us grow as disciples.

Sometimes preachers like Paul, and like me, have to nudge people and remind them that it is more blessed to give than to receive. I had to remind myself over and over again.

We still have our old in-grained habits of selfishness. Paul was pushing the Corinthians, and Paul pushes us to act true to who we most properly are. We are obliged, we are nudged, sometimes we are pushed, to give freely: the obligation nudges us to do what the new self would do if the old one didn't stand in the way.

Giving takes effort. Often we are simply too comfortable to give: we'd rather play, be entertained, or just plain do nothing. But when a gift is given, life becomes extraordinary because God's own gift giving flows through us, and we are filled to overflowing.

As we give we are changed, the old self dies a little more, we are clothed more fully in the new life in Christ. We find we are more our best selves, learning to be generous as God is generous, learning to be a community of caring for one another.

For a moment think about what you have – gifts, talents, time, finances, resources. Why did God give you these? How might you live generously, blessing others as you have been blessed?

I pray God will help you answer these questions well that we might continue to grow as his disciples.

Thanks be to God.