

April 7, 2024

2 Corinthians 9:6-10

“Always Enough”
Jennifer Riddle

Did you know that today is the second Sunday of Easter? Easter is a season rather than a day. In this season, we often remember the stories of Jesus in his time on earth following the resurrection, through the ascension, and ending at Pentecost Sunday. As Pastor Felipe reminded us last week, this season is all about new life. What might our life look like if we truly believed in all that Jesus taught us? Let’s take that thought with us into prayer.

The text I’ve chosen today is not the Gospel and it’s not a story about Jesus after the resurrection. In the Revised Common Lectionary, this story usually shows up on Thanksgiving, if one has a service that day, but more often it’s used during a stewardship season sermon. I chose it today because the truth this text bears often cuts right to the heart of our beliefs about who God is and whether or not we trust God. If we are able to take this to heart, our lives will truly be made new!

In the years that I’ve been serving alongside children and youth, I’ve noticed their particular attention to the needs of those around them. Kids tend to work together in concrete ways to make their world a better place. In Columbus alone, we have several wonderful examples of children who are working to share what they have with others.

During the beginning of the pandemic lockdown, eleven-year-old Ethan Reynolds set up a folding table in front of his house with food and toiletries to help folks struggling to make ends meet. Ethan’s mom recalled in a Republic article that even as a seven-year-old, “he would go to his room and get his candy and all of his little toys...and put them in boxes and offer them to other kids for free.” His desire to share and give what he had continued throughout the pandemic serves as a model that anyone can help by sharing what they have to give.

Ethan isn’t the only kid in Columbus that is drawn to share with others. The Lemonade Bros started selling lemonade at 17th and Washington in the summer of 2022, hoping to earn money for things they wanted to buy. But quickly their business focus changed as they began giving drinks to folks who didn’t have the money to pay. They also started using the money they earned to buy food and drinks for workers at Fire Station 1, Columbus Regional Hospital and Columbus City Police. They also raised funds for Riley Hospital for Children. The seven-, nine-, and fourteen-year-old brothers recently received a Spark Spirit Award from the Council for Youth Development and the Mark Teike Good Neighbor Award from Lincoln-Central Family Neighborhood Center.

I don’t think these kids are doing any of this generous work to gain attention, acclaim, or awards. And I don’t think they are the only children in our city doing this kind of work. There is something about seeing need through a child’s eyes that draws them to quick action

when adults may tend to hold back. Kids that are raised in secure environments don't see sharing as a risk—they see it as an opportunity to do the right thing. So why do most of us grown-ups miss this opportunity as we get older?

In Paul's letter to the Corinthians, I hear echoes of our typical adult arguments against giving hiding in the background. We want to know what our money is going toward. We want to know that it will make a difference and that we are good stewards of our resources. We might test the ground by sowing sparingly and waiting to see what happens, rather than giving a more significant amount right away.

The root of what Paul is speaking against in this passage is fear: fear that we will give too much away, and that we won't have enough for ourselves. If we function out of fear, we will never give with the kind of joy that God is longing for.

We've been conditioned by our capitalist and consumerist systems to avoid giving of ourselves generously. We are taught that what we have is never good enough. We must buy new things to keep up with trends and technology. We are also taught that making our way in the world requires stepping on our competition. If we want to succeed, we can't help others along the way because it may impede our progress. The core belief in this system is that resources are scarce and it's best to hoard them away from our competitors.

God's view of the world stands in stark opposition to scarcity and competition. In God's world, we live dependent on one another, not independently of each other. In this world, there is abundance when we are connected to God. It is when we share in mutuality with one another that we get to experience the Beloved Community.

In adulthood, just like Adam and Eve after they ate of the fruit of knowledge, our eyes are opened by awareness. Instead of an awareness of our nakedness, it's an awareness of the possibility of falling behind economically. And that awareness is fed by media consumption that focuses on our current economic challenges. There are a lot of forces nipping at our heels right now with inflation, a shrinking middle class, and unaffordable housing and medical care. These challenges create a wave of fear around us. But the new life we're called to in this Easter season is asking us to say no to our fear. How can we trust God and give generously when the world is telling us to sow sparingly with our money and energy?

First, we need to change our perspective. Like Peter walking on the water, when we look at the waves we drown. Instead, we must look at the beauty of the new life we're called to. We can re-frame our circumstances through a spirit of gratitude and delight. Research shows that spending only a few minutes a day recalling a handful of good things in our lives makes an impact on our willingness to be generous. When we recognize all the good that is in our life, we want to share it with others! This happens with noticing delight around us as well. We ought to take a cue from IU professor and writer Ross Gay, who inspires us to spend our day pointing out when we notice something delightful. In noticing our delights, it draws us

to want to share that joy with others and opens the door to sharing in our abundance as well.

After we change our perspective, we need to see the world as an interconnected web. What happens to one of us affects all of us both in our challenges and in our successes. When we recognize each other's humanity and choose to spend time in spaces where we grow to understand how similar our stories are, we are much more likely to be generous and share what we have. By recognizing that our neighbor's story of struggle could just as well be our own, we are also more open to helping care for them.

As we close today, I want to offer two different challenges to our congregation:

Kids: I want to thank you for the ways you keep teaching us adults the importance of being generous with what we have. Keep showing us all the ways we can love people around us who need something we can give, even if that's just a dollar or a hug.

Adults: remember that our world is much more like the mathematical constant pi rather than the dessert. Like the internet meme reminds us, if we think of what we have as pie (the dessert), we only have 8 slices and then we're done. Instead, remember that what we have to give is more like the mathematical pi—irrational and never-ending. God's abundance is just like the gardener in the Gospel parable, throwing seeds of love everywhere. We must simply choose to join her to take part in making the world a more joyous and equitable place.

Discussion questions:

1. Share a time when you gave generously with your expertise, time, or money. What was your frame of mind when you were giving?
2. Do you tend to be more generous or cautious with your money or time? What life experiences have influenced your current response?
3. In 2 Corinthians 9:8, Paul seems to say that those who give generously will always have enough. What do you think about this in light of our experience and understanding of the world?