

## **Sermon**

### **2Corinthians 8.1-15**

In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, Amen.

It's a pleasure to see our church full to the brim in a combined service of thanksgiving and I welcome people from both the Emmanuel Karen congregation and the Christ Church Little River congregation here to Holy Trinity today.

Over the last few weeks, we have been following the lectionary readings from Paul' Second letter to the Corinthians. This week, we have the first half of chapter eight and it's all about generosity. Given the diverse mix of people here today, I thought, we'd do something different and hear about generosity from our own groups. But first, let me give a bit of insight into the reading.

Well, at its most literal level, this letter is about Paul asking the wealthy Corinthians for money for the poor congregations in Jerusalem. As I mentioned earlier in this sermon series, this "second" letter is quite possibly an amalgam of two or three subsequent letters written by Paul to the Corinthians covering a range of issues. And when we think of the concept of generosity which is covered extensively in this reading, I'd like to draw out three points.

Firstly, is the significant link between grace and generosity. Paul's use of the Greek word "charis"—usually translated as "grace" provides us with a clue (note and also the root word for charity and charism). The word occurs frequently in this reading and is used to refer not only to God's grace and Christ's grace but also to the generosity that overflows in us as a result of divine grace.

The word *charis*, however, is only translated as “grace” in verse 1. Elsewhere it is translated as “privilege” (verse 4), “generous undertaking” (8:6–7), and “generous act” (8:9). What if we translated these instances of *charis* with the English word “grace,” allowing Paul’s own use of this word in this reading to determine what the word means? Let’s listen.

Paul begins his discussion by referring to the grace of God granted to the Macedonian churches who, in spite of their affliction and poverty, “overflowed” with a wealth of generosity for others. So the act of God’s grace can lead to an overflowing of generosity in us. The Macedonians had begged Paul and his coworkers for the grace of sharing in this ministry of the saints (2 Corinthians 8:4) and affirmed as well that Paul should send Titus to complete the grace of collecting the funds he had already begun to collect from the Corinthians (2 Corinthians 8:6).

Paul now urges the Corinthians to follow the Macedonians’ example and “overflow” in this grace as well. They already “overflow” with everything else—faith, speech, knowledge, every eagerness, and the love fellow Christians have for them—so why not also overflow in this grace?

Secondly, the main warrant for Paul’s appeal, is the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ: Though rich, Christ became poor for our sakes so that by his poverty we might become rich (2 Corinthians 8:9).

So how might God’s and Christ’s grace, which is already overflowing in the Macedonians, also overflow in the Corinthians, or us? Continuing with his point that this is not a command but merely an “opinion,” Paul says that it would be appropriate for them at this time not only to desire to do so, but also to complete the collection they have already started.

How does this overflowing grace and generosity get lived out in our lives? Thirdly, Paul makes clear that this is not about relieving some and afflicting others; it is not about letting some off the hook and making others feel

guilty. Rather, it is about the equality or fairness—the true reciprocity—that God’s reconciliation of the entire world makes possible. One’s overflow or abundance is to meet another’s need, and vice versa, so that both might be there for one another in all instances of abundance and of need—spiritual or monetary. We are called to share our wealth so that some do not have too much and others do not have too little (2 Corinthians 8:15; Exodus 16:18).

So what were those three key points again? First, that grace, the unearned gift of God’s love and mercy, is indelibly linked to generosity. Secondly, that Jesus is the ultimate example of generosity and grace in action. Through his death, we are all saved. And thirdly, because of God’s grace, we are called to share our wealth so that there is a fair balance between our abundance and other’s needs.

Let’s hear from Soraya and then John about how generosity and grace has made a difference in their lives.

Let us pray. Loving and gracious God, we give you thanks that you are a god of grace and generosity. We pray that we too can be generous in our words, deeds and spiritual actions. Give us the courage and desire to help provide balance in our world today. In Jesus name we pray, Amen.