

Being the Church at Brentwood

Rich? Who Me?

Ps 130 & 2 Corinthians 8:7-15

July 1, 2012

476, 358, 530, 563

In this section of the compilation of Paul's writings to the Corinthians, he is talking about money.

Paul is raising again with the Corinthian church something that he had discussed with them before – a collection being made for the poor in Rome. He is urging generosity in giving.

We do not have detailed information on the relative wealth or poverty of the church in Corinth as compared to the church in Rome. There are clearly some complex dynamics going on here – giving for others as opposed to keeping it for ourselves; the tensions between the Jewish and Gentile wings of the emerging church; how needs are assessed and what responses are appropriate; and comparing the generosity of one community with that of another.

I will come back to the issue of generosity in the church in a moment.

Where I want to start this morning is with Paul's explanation of the motivation for giving.

As with everything in his theology, it begins with what God has done for us in Jesus Christ. It begins with the riches that God has bestowed on us through the grace of Jesus Christ. At the heart of those riches is our reconciliation with God, the restoration of the relationship that God intended with humanity in creation, the close intimacy of friends with a compassionate companion, of children with a loving and revered parent.

Out of that relationship,
that faith in the source and sustaining power of our lives,
all that is good emerges as we flourish in the grace of Jesus Christ.

The joy of faith,
the stimulation of speech,
the wisdom of knowledge,
the energy of compassion,
and the comfort of love.

As elsewhere in his writings,
here love and compassion for others is the real test of faith for Paul.

Are we treating others as God treated us in Jesus Christ?

Are we drawing on our spiritual riches
in order to use our material riches,
however large or small they may be,
in the service of God's commonwealth?

We are all richer than we can imagine
through the grace of Jesus Christ.

We are all richer than we can imagine
through the quality of relationship with the Creator
that Christ has made possible for all of us.

We are all richer than we can imagine
through the power and potential we have to do good
by virtue of being friends with God,
amigos de Christo,
companions of the Lord.

We are all richer than we can imagine
through being made whole in order to flourish
in the grace of Jesus Christ,
being a blessing in everything that we do.

We are all richer than we can imagine
through the nourishment that we get
week by week
in the welcoming, supportive, stimulating
community of the friends of Jesus Christ
found here at Brentwood Presbyterian.

Those are the spiritual gifts that make us all rich,
the spiritual gifts we all enjoy through God's generosity.

And what about our generosity?

I just want to sow a few thoughts this morning
about the practicalities of being the church of Jesus Christ
here at Brentwood in North Burnaby.

We have served this community with dedication
for almost 50 years now.

Many of you,
along with others who graced these pews over those years,
gave of your time, talent, and treasure
to make this church a blessing in this community.
You've seen good times and bad times,
times of plenty and times of scarcity.
Dramatic changes have happened in the community around us
and they have had an impact on this congregation.

Here's how I see our current situation.

We want to grow in faith, in numbers, in service to this community,
and in resources to sustain and expand our mission
through a variety of ministries that will benefit our neighbourhood.

To do that, we need many things.

First and foremost, we need the kind of prayer
that will keep us aligned with God's will for this community.

Second, we need to be constantly exploring with each other
what might be possible and feasible to do
to ensure a flourishing future build on the foundations already laid.

Third, we need to give generously as the Lord has prospered us
to provide the material resources to support Brentwood's mission and ministries
and to manage our resources wisely to generate several streams of revenue.

That is already happening here
and we can improve on what we are doing.

Givings in the collection plate have risen considerably over the past couple of years
and we need to continue that form of generosity.

We are not generating as much revenue as we did three years ago
through the rental of our facilities
and we need to address that in our conversations with BTPC.

We are being successful in getting various grants for special ministries,
for our ESL through Music and our community services.

Many of us are richer in accumulated resources
than we are in usable resources,
largely because our houses and condos have appreciated so much in value.
We need to give some thought to leaving a bequest to this congregation,
to building up our endowment fund so it becomes a steady stream of revenue
for the mission and ministries of this congregation.

All of this generosity of material resources
is grounded in our gratitude for what God has given us,
especially what God has provided for us
through this congregation of his church.
Brentwood deserves our prayers,
our gifts of time and talent,
and our generosity with our treasure.

I pray that the Holy Spirit will use these reflections
to help you flourish in the grace of Jesus Christ.

Written and preached by the Rev. Dr. Brian Fraser
Minister with Brentwood Presbyterian Church, Burnaby, BC