**Sermon 5/19/19**

**2nd Corinthians 9:1-15**

Four young men were students at a Bible College, and they rented a house together.

One Saturday morning someone knocked on their door.

When they opened it, there stood a bedraggled-looking old man.

His eyes were marbleized, and he had a silvery stub of whiskers on his face.

His clothes were ragged and torn.

His shoes didn't match. In fact, they were both for the same foot.

He carried a wicker basket full of unappealing vegetables which he was trying to sell.

The boys felt sorry for him and bought some of his vegetables just to help him out.

Then he went on his way.

But from that time on, every Saturday, he appeared at their door,

          with his basket of vegetables.

As the boys got to know him a little bit better, they began inviting him in

          to visit a while before continuing on his rounds.

They soon discovered his eyes looked marbleized, not because of drugs or alcohol,

          but because of cataracts.

They learned he lived just down the street in an old shack.

They also found out he could play the harmonica,

           and he loved to play Christian hymns, and he really loved God.

So every Saturday they would invite him in, and he would play his harmonica,

           and they would sing Christian hymns together.

They became good friends, and the boys began trying to figure out ways to help him.

One Saturday morning, right in the middle of all their singing & praising,

                he suddenly said to them, "God is so good!"

And they all agreed, "Yes, God is so good."

He went on, "You know why he is so good?"

They said, "Why?"

He said, "Because yesterday, when I got up and opened my door,

                 there were boxes full of clothes, and shoes, and coats, and gloves.

                Yes, God is so good!"

And the boys smiled at each other and chimed in, "Yes, God is so good."

He went on, "You know why He is so good?"

They answered, "You already told us why. What more?"

He said, "Because I found a family who could use those things,

             and I gave them all away. God is so good to me."

In taking his collection for poor people,

              Paul mainly appealed to the Christian responsibility to help those in need.

But in this passage he also details generosity's side effects.

Giving actually enriches and benefits the giver, he says.

Also, a gift can serve as an act of worship to God,

            and can inspire other people's faith and thanksgiving.

A rich, but cynical businessman said to one of his staff,

            “Show me a truly unselfish act and I will give you a $100 bill.”

The staffer, said, "OK, walk with me at the lunch hour."

They went to a part of town where there were lots of street people.

The staffer said, "Pick out anyone of these folks at random,

            and I will show you an unselfish act."

The businessman pointed to one old man and said, "That one."

The staffer walked over to the old man, and gave him a $10 bill.

He turned to the businessman and said,

          “There! I just did an unselfish act. Where is my $100 bill?”

The businessman started to speak, but stopped in his tracks,

           when the old man shouted to some of his friends:

           “Hey, guys! I have a tenner! Let's go buy something to eat!”

The businessman looked at his staffer, and said, "Your act was selfish.

           You gave $10 to get $100.

           But that old man ... now, that was unselfish.

           So, I guess you get the $100 anyway,

           because you did show me an unselfish act."

Embarrassed by his own selfishness, the staffer called to the old man,

          and gave him the $100 bill, also. "Have a real party," he said.

Paul said to the Corinthians: "Each of you must give as you have made up your mind,

          not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver."

Every day in millions of mailboxes across the United States,

         letters with special "non-profit" postage stamps appear,

         stuffed among catalogs, magazines, and flyers from retail stores.

Fund-raising through the mail is big business, for Jews, Catholics, Protestants,

         and a large assortment of charitable organizations.

The apostle Paul never engineered a million-piece charity appeal.

The empire's postal service, and the cost of papyrus and ink,

         as well as the time and manpower to write such appeals,

         made such an idea unthinkable.

But in his 2nd letter to the Corinthians, he does present a direct appeal for funds.

Jewish Christians near Jerusalem were reportedly on the edge of starvation.

Paul seized on the crisis as a perfect chance for Gentile Christians

          to reach out in compassion and demonstrate

          their spiritual unity with Jewish Christians.

Paul outlines a philosophy of Christian giving, holding up Jesus Christ as a model.

He explains the goal of such giving and the proper attitude of the givers.

He even applies a little pressure by citing examples

          of Christians less well off than the Corinthians.

This brief passage on giving, shows Paul's holistic concerns.

While still recuperating from personal trauma,

         he had agreed to head up a major fund-raising drive

         on behalf of the needy in Jerusalem.

His scholarship didn't dampen a zeal for practical Christian love.

His concern for souls didn't crowd out concern for their hungry bodies.

Paul urged the Corinthians to never forget the poor.

The one who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly.

And the one who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully.

We sow the seeds. God causes them to grow.

Seed outwardly seems small and insignificant, but inwardly its potential is immense.

Christian giving always rebounds with multiplied blessings for the giver.

Not only is the recipient blessed, the giver is also.

With so many unselfish blessings flowing around,

           thankfulness and glory to God abounds.

The things we do, and the choices we make, can have a significant impact,

           not only in our lives, but in the lives of others as well.

A growing body of research has connected an attitude of gratitude

           with a number of positive emotional and health benefits.

Adults who frequently feel grateful, have more energy, more optimism,

            more social connections and more happiness than those who do not.

They are also less likely to be depressed, envious, greedy, or alcoholics.

They earn more money, sleep more soundly, exercise more regularly,

            and have greater resistance to viral infections.

Continually giving thanks to God brings us joy, and it brings others joy as well.

Our gratitude to God should be a whole new way of life that infects others

           with the wonderful blessings of God's grace!

A young man inherited a rice field.

He was new at farming but learned what he could from those around him.

He discovered that in order to grow rice,

           the rice paddies are covered with irrigated water.

In his first season as a farmer, the man noticed the irrigation water

           ran through his field and the crop was good.

But the water overflowed into his neighbor's field,

           and helped that man's crop grow also.

So when the next season came, the new farmer said to himself,

           "Why should I permit all the water to flow through my field into his?

            Water is wealth, and I ought to keep it all for myself."

So the young farmer built a dam which

            prevented the water from flowing into his neighbor's fields.

The result? He had no rice crop at all that year.

When he dammed up the water, it became stagnant,

             and it created a marsh and a swamp, and the rice could not grow.

God allows His blessings to flow into our lives like a refreshing stream.

But if we simply keep those blessings to ourselves,

            we become stagnant and worthless to God as a partner in his ministry.

When we give freely because of what God has given us,

            then we become partners in God's ministry.

Then God's blessings flow into our lives, and through us into other people's lives,

          then into the lives more people, and through them, even more people.

**AMEN**