

2 CORINTHIANS 8:7-15  
LIVING GENEROUSLY

What makes you feel grateful? Being grateful in life is a huge thing, but it is sometimes rare! So, is there something for which you are grateful, or thankful this morning? It might be the beauty of the days this week; you enjoy warmth and heat and are glad to be out enjoying the sunshine. It might be family: you are grateful for your children, or grandchildren, or your parents and their love; these relationships are precious and maybe this week you have been especially grateful for the love and support of a family member; perhaps friends would fall into a similar group. It might be something you do: a bowling match that you enjoyed, not even because you won but because you enjoyed the company of the people you played with; a golf game might fit the same category! It might be work: you are glad to have your job because you love doing it, you meet lots of good people or feel a deep sense of satisfaction at having completed a task. It might be your health: you feel grateful to enjoy good health, either because you have been through times when own health has been a bit poor, or because you know so many other people who have been struggling. It might be church: you are grateful to know your fellow Christians in this place, glad of their support through a difficult time, or simply grateful to be in worship this morning with people who think the same way as you. It may be something else...

The interesting thing about that list is that for each of the things for which we feel grateful, all of them can equally be a source of anxiety and stress for us. Almost everything on that list can cause us to struggle with life and so there is something good about being grateful for all of these things in our lives. There is one more: we should be grateful for Jesus. Arguably our deepest sense of gratitude should be for Jesus and all that God has given us in Jesus. It is easy to take Jesus for granted: we know the stories of what He has done for us, but at times these stories seem just to wash over us. A deep sense of gratitude to God for Jesus is at the heart of all that we are and do as Christians, responding to what God has done for us in Jesus. Especially, as we have tasted God's grace in Jesus, so we are challenged to be generous and gracious to other people.

Paul is writing to the Church in Corinth about their giving. Churches have characteristics just as people do: he writes to them about the churches in Macedonia and tells them how these churches are really generous, even though the people themselves are poor; you get the feeling that the church in Corinth is a bit more tight-fisted! Here is a reason to give! This is a motivational speech, or a letter; he never says "how much"; he just says be generous and here's why! The Christians in Jerusalem had been in trouble; there had been a famine in that part of the world around the time of this letter and the Christians in other places across Europe had been encouraged to give; some had done so with great willingness; others less so! Maybe Corinth was a 'less-so-church!' There are good things in Corinth: "*Just as...*" (2 Corinthians 8:7) There are lots of things to commend them; there are lots of parts of church life at which they excel; now Paul is challenging them to excel in their giving too! Churches in Scotland are the same: there are lots of good things at which we excel, but it is good for us today to be reminded of why we give and why be generous! Let's see the need!

"*You know...*" (2 Corinthians 8:9) This is Jesus: He was rich in so many ways but made Himself poor! He was rich in the glory of God, the Son of God before the world began, and enjoyed the glory of God, and shared that glory with His Father; He was the centre of all creation, everything made by Him and for Him; He was One with the Father. Such greatness belonged to Jesus and it was His by right. But He chose to give it all up for a time; He made Himself poor; He humbled Himself to come to live in our world, born in a stable in an out-of-the-way place, to parents that no-one would notice in a crowd, growing up in a world backwater, in the family of the village carpenter. Then He humbled Himself more to suffer at the hands of the authorities and put Himself in the way of the cross; He was the victim of injustice, of a miscarriage of justice, but allowed Himself to be crucified on a cross, suffering physically the pain of crucifixion, suffering spiritually the sense of being abandoned for a time by God, and all of this necessary for our salvation. Jesus, who was rich beyond compare, beyond imagination, made Himself poor for us. Such generous love!

Jesus made Himself poor that we might be rich! This is not a money thing, but a matter of the spirit! What has Jesus given us? We have peace with God and all that God might have against us by way of faults, mistakes, the mess we make of life – all that is taken away and we are forgiven and there is peace for us with God. We have hope: the hope that Jesus is with us everywhere we go and is always able to help us and listen to our prayers; the hope that tomorrow we will still be loved no matter what; the hope that one day we will share His glory. We are loved: here is God who loves us as we are, who loves us when we don't deserve to be loved – that's what grace means – and who loves is with a love that is new every day. Peace, hope, love – these are qualities that you can't buy; you can't put a price on them, but these are ours in Jesus. These are summed up in the big Bible word "salvation" – God has given us these gifts and graces. What generous love!

We see that generosity of spirit in the story we read of Jesus from Mark chapter 5. There are two stories tangled up in each other; we read the story in the middle of a woman who has been ill for 12 years. Jesus and the crowd are on the way to the house of Jairus, a church leader, who has asked Jesus to come and help, to heal his 12-year old girl and Jesus is on His way; there's a hurry on! But this woman is in the crowd and says to herself: "*If I...*" (Mark 5:28) and she did; she touched the hem of Jesus' coat. Two things happened: "*Immediately...*" (5:29) and "*At once...*" (5:30) There was a hurry on, but Jesus stopped and took time with this nameless woman. "*Daughter...*" (5:34) The woman was desperate; she tried to hide in the crowd, but Jesus took time to show her love and compassion; we see the generosity of spirit in Him, while others are pressing Him to hurry up and move on. By the way, He healed the 12-year old girl as well. We see Jesus' generosity.

Generosity: what does that look like? The most obvious mark of generosity is in giving money: as a Church we don't tell you how much to give; our giving is a response to what we see of God's giving to us; our giving is a response to what we see as the need of others in the world. You have been very generous in your giving: you responded well to our letter earlier in the year and what you give to church has gone up very well; you have given very well to Christian Aid and to two other charities in the last month or so; that mark of generosity in individuals and in a church community is good to see. There are other marks of generosity:

- making people feel welcome when they don't conform, and some of that is about dress or behaviour, and is about lifestyle perhaps too, not to make people conform to some hidden set of rules but make them feel welcome just as they are.
- Being generous is also about the way we speak to one another: someone makes a barbed remark or criticism and the easiest thing in the world is to reply in the same kind of way; grace shapes the way we speak in a different way, with forgiveness, kindness, patience, with a generous spirit rather than a carping, critical spirit.
- Being generous means caring for people without measuring: I say this carefully, but we see people in need and we give ourselves to care for whatever it takes, not measuring time or energy but as giving much as it takes within our power to care and without boasting about what we do so that everyone knows!!
- Patience, forgiveness, compassion, kindness – these are all marks of a generous spirit in us.

How will we respond to Jesus' generosity? Will we take what He has given us in both hands and say "thank you very much"? Then will we learn to be generous? To give? To love and care for others? To have a generous spirit in us, with patience, kindness, forgiveness, compassion to other people? "*you know...*" (2 Corinthians 8:9) What difference will it make to us that we know Jesus and His generous love to us? This is why we give: we see the need; we see Jesus be generous to us; we respond with an open heart and with open hands!