

“Fruit of the Spirit: Goodness”
Sunday, June 5, 2011

Lesson II Corinthians 9: 1-8

II Corinthians is a patchwork collection of Paul's letters replying to questions coming from the quixotic, exasperating, down-and-dirty church at Corinth. In this bit, he's writing about a fund drive throughout Greece (Achaia) and Macedonians to raise money to help the Christians in Jerusalem. The mother church is in trouble. The Christians there (the saints) suffer economic oppression. They are treated as outcasts.

Now it is not necessary for me to write you about the ministry to the saints, for I know your eagerness, which is the subject of my boasting about you to the people of Macedonia, saying that Achaia has been ready since last year; and your zeal has stirred up most of them.

But I am sending the brothers in order that our boasting about you may not prove to have been empty in this case, so that you may be ready, as I said you would be; otherwise, if some Macedonians come with me and find that you are not ready, we would be humiliated—to say nothing of you—in this undertaking. So I thought it necessary to urge the brothers to go on ahead to you, and arrange in advance for this bountiful gift that you have promised, so that it may be ready as a voluntary gift and not as an extortion.

Paul uses this stewardship appeal to convey a great and wonderful truism: what you sow is what you reap.

How often people grump and gripe when something fails to live up to their expectations! This happens because most of us lesser lights are emotional parasites. We keep expecting others to give us what we need. Remoras we be! Or leeches! Or tapeworms!

We sit down. We spread the napkin across our lap. We wait to be served. We forget the practical truth that what you will get out of something is pretty much what you put into it. It isn't what you get from the table, it is what you bring to it that makes all the difference.

The point is this: the one who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and the one who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. Each of you must give as you have made up your mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to provide you with every blessing in abundance, so that by always having enough of everything, you may share abundantly in every good work.

Reflection

I came across a pretty helpful devotion the other day in which the writer talked about scarcity versus abundance

What is scarce? What do we worry about running out of?
Water? Money? Time? Gasoline?

What isn't scarce? Love, goodness. All that stuff drawn from the spiritual well.

Things of this world are finite, mere buckets. But the things of God are unlimited, replenished aquifers of grace.

What is good?

It's a good message.
That's a good drawing.
Today is a good day
She earned good grades
He's a good man
Good God

In particular, the Greek word for goodness [*a-ga-thos-un-e*] hones in on moral goodness, that which is honorable. Far more than something that is useful or pleasant.

Honorable. Morally good.

But whose good? How do we know what is good?

What might be a good to me might not be good to you.

So is it all relative? Our goodness chameleon-esque? Well, yes, if it is our good, shaped and colored by us and our situations.

But there is a truer template upon which we pattern our active goodness. Which is why we gather for worship. As a young person reminded me this week, where else can we be stretched and shaped by that which we honor? Where else do we continue to grow and learn what is worth learning and becoming?

We conform our sense of goodness to the Christ. Upon the revealed character of Christ. May this be true of all our graduates.

Christ who beholds all this and us as sacred
Christ who calls it (and us) as it is - truth-telling

Christ who respects all persons
 Christ who treats persons on the basis of his love rather than their deservedness
 Christ treating persons as individuals rather than stereotypes
 Christ seeing all as potential friends and fellow believers

High School Recognition

Welcome our newest candidates for adulthood.

High School: Alexandra Cole, Dylan Dailey, Kaitlyn Raup, Madison Lindemann

College: Stacey Vernon, Ryan Dailey

You feeling good? I hope you do more than feel good. Do good.

The Sacrament of the Lord's Supper

Which is why we invest our faith in a person. Like marriage or parenthood. We aren't married to an idea nor a principle nor regulations. We marry a person with all the discovery, mystery, mutual commitment, growth that this covenant involves. A process of trusting and loving and doing, with all its ups and downs.

Here's a faith where people can live. Other stuff the church worries about isn't really that important when compared with cancer, suicide, struggles in marriage, raising kids, saying goodbye to friends.

What are you bringing to the table? What are you bringing to this relationship with Christ?

Your hopes?

Your needs?

Your commitment?

Your hurts?

Yourself entirely?

What will you sow that you may reap?