

Sometimes life would be so much easier if it was like when your classmate brought in treats for his birthday in school. The birthday boy brings in a shareable treat and brings in enough for everyone, and everyone gets just one piece. It's all even. It's all fair.

But life isn't like that in practice. We live in a world of givers and receivers, haves and have nots. There are many different kinds of have nots, some have family, others don't. Some have friends, others don't. Some have smarts, others... not so much. Some have health, others aren't so blessed.

But the inequality that can really bring out the beast in us is inequality with money. It's taboo to talk about how much money you make at work. When it comes to donating money, those who are more materially blessed often feel badgered by charities and the needy who are in need of assistance. They have a once bitten twice shy approach when they've been taken advantage of.

On the other hand, those who are receivers of gifts struggle not to squander what is given to them. They must avoid the temptation to take gifts for granted. They must learn to live with less and know the limits of those who are gifted and generous. These money conversations can really be touchy topics.

The more things change, the more they stay the same. The Apostle Paul, the author of our Epistle Lesson, lived in a world of haves and have nots. Jerusalem served as the origin of the Christian Church as the ministry of Jesus radiated from Jerusalem to the rest of the known world. However, the Church in Jerusalem was facing tough times. A famine in the land made it so the church was having difficulty meeting their basic daily needs. As Paul planted churches throughout the Mediterranean, he also solicited donations that could go back to Jerusalem, the mother church.

Our Lord said, **“For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”** Unfortunately in many congregations, we vote with our pocketbooks. There is a temptation for giving to dry up when a leader or a pastor makes an unpopular decision. There can be a temptation among pastors not to rock the boat to talk about money and giving when other controversies are brewing in the church.

Not so Paul, some of our best teachings on charitable giving in the New Testament are in Paul's two letters to the Corinthians. However, Corinth was a troubled church in a troubled town. Yes, they had the money and had a higher standard of living than many others in the Roman world. They were prime candidates to be givers who could support a physically struggling congregation in Jerusalem. But the church reflected the morally bankrupt culture around them: sexual immorality, power politics in the church, and drunkenness at the Lord's Supper name just a few of their problems. Perhaps unsurprisingly, they questioned Paul's authority because it's easier to reject the naysayer than repent of sinful ways.

You would think Paul would steer clear of the topic of money on top of all those other controversial opinions, but Paul forges right ahead. 3. Givers sometimes live in tension with receivers.

What tactics did Paul use? First, he uses the Macedonians as an example. We read, **“We want you to know, brothers, about the grace of God that has been given among the churches of Macedonia, for in a severe test of affliction, their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part.”** The Macedonians were backwater people who lived in poverty. Paul is trying to give the Corinthians a healthy sense of competition, and to encourage them to realize that it isn’t just the rich who are givers.

Sometimes when it comes to class birthdays, it’s the kid from the poor household that brings the best treats. That really inspires the more affluent kids to encourage their parents to pull out all the stops. It’s similar to giving in the church.

Paul then points out how much the Corinthians have: **“But as you excel in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in all earnestness, and in our love for you—see that you excel in this act of grace also.”** Let’s be honest, it doesn’t matter if you come from a rich or a poor family, the kid who brought the pan of brownies for the class birthday party didn’t buy it himself. Mom or dad bought the ingredients and baked the treat. Maybe the girl helped a bit, but she didn’t do it alone. Even the abundance we think we own isn’t ours, but the Lord’s.

As we consider the giver-receiver relationship, we realize we cannot outgive our Lord. We often refer to this topic as stewardship. Stewards take care of those things that aren’t theirs. Everything we have belongs to God, and even the poorest among us is still overflowing with blessings directly from our Heavenly Father.

Paul continues, **“For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich.”** The inspiration for the Christian to give ultimately ties back to the sacrificial work of Jesus Christ.

In the 1987 Danish film *Babette’s Feast*, a French refugee, Babette, flees the Franco-Prussian War in the late 1800s to seek asylum in a bland Danish town. She is taken in as a housekeeper by a strict Christian household that lives a simple life and shuns the finer things of life.

Life continues on as normal until Babette wins the lottery of what would now be worth \$60,000, but she decides to spend it all on a lavish feast for the family that took her in as a housekeeper. This meal warms the hearts of her stern hosts, and they begin to appreciate the joys of life. At the end of the movie, it is revealed that she is a world-famous chef who worked at a famous restaurant in Paris.

This story reflects the love of Christ who left everything He had in heaven to be born of the Virgin Mary. His simple life was a far cry from the royal treatment

He deserved. His suffering and death was the most painful death in history made all the worse because He was bearing the sins of the world.

Yet because of all of this, you have become rich. You excel in faith, in speech, in knowledge, and in all earnestness, as well as our love for you. You have received every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, and even the material gifts you have are because the Father is pleased with you in Christ Jesus. Christ feeds you with a meal more lavish than Babette’s Feast, the Lord’s Supper, and although it is simple bread and wine, it is a gift that gives what a 5-star Michelin meal couldn’t: the forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation. 2. Christ gave all for you, so that you may become rich.

From this wealth of gratitude, we can gladly give to those who have needs. From the grace that overflows from Christ’s love, we can live a gracious life. Yes, this applies to local charities that care for physical needs, but this also applies to the local church and ministries that flow from it.

Paul concludes our text saying, **“For I do not mean that others should be eased and you burdened, but that as a matter of fairness your abundance at the present time should supply their need, so that their abundance may supply your need, that there may be fairness.”**

Growing up, I felt like I was missing out of the birthday treat celebrations because my birthday was in the summer. I never got the chance to share my favorite treat with my classmates. The Bible teaches us it is more blessed to give than to receive.

And if we think about it, strictly speaking, there is no such thing as givers and receivers. Maybe the receivers receive monetary gifts, but there are so many ways to give back. Like I mentioned earlier in the sermon, one can be rich in other ways than money. Corinth may have had money, but Jerusalem was the source of the Gospel through which the Holy Spirit worked faith in the hearts of the Corinthians.

Plus, the nature of giving is what comes around goes around. Our congregation supports a missionary who is going back to Germany, the birthplace of Lutheranism. Christianity is exploding in Africa, and they are sending missionaries to us.

Thank you to those who have given of their time, talents, and treasure to the ministry at this place. Please consider ways in which the Lord may be calling you to continue to partner with us in the Gospel because 1. Everyone can give something, and we can share our gifts with others. **BECAUSE WE HAVE RECEIVED SO MUCH FROM CHRIST, WE CAN GLADLY SHARE WHAT WE HAVE WITH OTHERS.**