

Sixth Sunday after Pentecost
Proper 8
Year B

Wisdom of Solomon 1:13-15, 2:23-24
Psalm 30
2 Corinthians 8:7-15
Mark 5:21-43

People make commitments all the time. Whenever we sign a contract or a lease, we are making a commitment to fulfill the terms of that agreement. In our personal lives, making commitments is a daily, if not hourly, activity. And, of course, we make commitments in church. That is what Paul is discussing in this chapter of his second letter to the church in Corinth. A year before, they had made a pledge to support the Christians in Jerusalem and now it was time to fulfill that commitment.

It would be easy to pit the Corinthians against the Christians in Macedonia - to create a competition between the two groups. While it may appear that is what Paul is doing, he is really telling the Corinthians that the churches in Macedonia have accepted this idea of supporting their fellow Christians and have joined in the collection. Paul is careful to praise the Corinthians for their work and faith while encouraging them to fulfill their pledge.

In his efforts to pursue the completion of the collection of funds for the people in Jerusalem, Paul uses an interesting reminder - all we have is given to us by the grace of God. We are indebted to God for our well-being, physically and financially. Thus, we should use our abundance for the relief of others - to extend that grace to those who are suffering. Although it is difficult to tell in our English translation, Paul uses the term grace 8 or 9 times in this chapter. The word "*charis*" is the root word for Eucharist. In this sense, God's grace is what we give thanks for each Sunday. It is this same grace which Paul is invoking in his plea to the people of Corinth.

Our outreach ministries are examples of us spreading grace to others. Whether it is through our efforts on Wednesday evening, our support for Least of These, or the money we raise for the Marion Medical Missions and their work in Africa, we are following the example of these early Christians in their support for the saints in Jerusalem. We are sharing from our abundance to help those in need. It is not uncommon for churches to pledge to set aside a portion of their operating budget for outreach work. We have opted to raise extra money for this work. Either way, we are emulating those of the first century in spreading the grace with which God has blessed us for the aid of those less fortunate. For this I applaud you and praise God for you.

A further complication for Paul was the fact that the church leaders in Jerusalem were at the heart of the effort to restrict the freedom of the gentile believers in joining the church. It was those leaders who were insisting that all must follow the laws and practices of Judaism before they could become members of the church. Yet, Paul was asking gentiles to support these people. This should be a lesson to us. God does not call us to support only those who agree with us or support our political or religious agendas. We are called to help everyone in need. God does not send the rain only on the righteous, but also on the unrighteous. In other words, as we read in so

many places in scripture, God is not a respecter of persons - God loves everyone equally - and we are called to spread our abundance to all equally. True, this is not what we see happening in the world around us, but we are called to a different standard. We call ourselves followers of Jesus and, therefore, we are called to act as He would. This is Paul's message to the Corinthian Church and this is his call to us.

Let us continue the work we have pledged to do and continue to be a blessing to those around us in Christian County, as well as those in other parts of the world. God has blessed us abundantly. Let us share God's grace with others.