

# **“Prepared Generosity”**

## **Sixth Sunday of Easter**

### **2 Corinthians 9:1-5**

“I know of your readiness, of which I boast about you to the people of Macedonia” 2  
Corinthians 9:2

A blessed Mothers’ day to all mothers, grandmothers, mothers in laws, and mothers to be. For that matter, a blessed Mothers’ Day to all who have a mother! Did I leave anyone out?

Mothers’ Day is of course not part of our liturgical church year calendar. But it is a holiday that the broader culture observes. We as Christians have our citizenship in heaven as St. Paul declares to the Philippians (Philippians 3:20). So it must be remembered that we are not ultimately of this world as Christians. We are not to be conformed to its ways (Romans 12:2). Yet, we do live in this world. Most of us here today live somewhere in San Diego County, to be more precise. We are called to engage the world for the sake of the Gospel (1 Corinthians 9:22). We do this so that the citizens of this world might be transformed by the renewal of their minds (Romans 12:2) and be called to belong to Christ (Romans 1:6) as citizens of heaven. And so it is appropriate to take time within our Worship service to observe Mothers’ Day. I also want to connect Mothers’ Day and the ideal role of mothers in our lives to the topic of stewardship as we are considering that theme in our sermons during the first three weeks in the month of May, leading up to the annual voters’ meeting on May 17.

In St. Paul’s Second Letter to his young coworker, St. Timothy, the Apostle gives us a glimpse into one role that God desires for mothers to play in our lives. Paul says to Timothy, “I am reminded of your sincere faith, a faith that dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice and now, I am sure, dwells in you as well” (2 Timothy 1:5). The Lay Ministers and I spent some time in our meeting last week reflecting on this Scripture passage in our discussion of the fourth commandment to honor our fathers and mothers. Parents have a responsibility to teach the Christian faith in the home and to bring their children to know the Lord through regular attendance in Worship, Sunday school and Bible Study.

All of us as members of the Church have a responsibility for training up spiritually the children of our congregation. It is part of our good stewardship as Christians and members of a local congregation like Atonement. You all will have an opportunity to encourage some of Atonement’s younger baptized members in a very special and meaningful way in a couple of weeks as five of them will be honored on our Day of Confirmation this May 24.

Yes, on this Mothers’ Day we remember the important role that mothers should play in the spiritual formation of their children. We can also be reminded of the role of fathers as spiritual heads and leaders of the household and we can remind ourselves that we all, as members of the Church, play an important

part in the faith formation of those in our midst. We thank God for giving us that responsibility. And we ask him to help us carry it out faithfully.

Also, on this Mothers' Day, we turn our attention towards the topic of stewardship. And we can make an important connection between what is modeled in the home and what then is modeled in other spheres of life like the church and civil realm. We begin to see the value of stewardship being modeled first in the home and then within the church and within the civil realm in places like school, our places of employment, and the like. For, faithful stewardship with all that the Lord has given to us flows first and foremost from faith in Christ. Faith, that as Paul reminded Timothy, is formed and modeled in the home.

We have been learning more about the topic of faithful, Christ-centered stewardship during this three week sermon series by considering chapters eight and nine of Paul's Second Letter to the Corinthians. Last week we looked at chapter eight and reflected on the theme, "Joyful Generosity." Today we look at the first five verses of chapter nine and reflect on the theme, "Prepared Generosity."

We learned last week that in chapters eight and nine Paul compares and contrasts two groups: the congregation at Corinth and the Macedonian congregations. Corinth is located in the southern part of Greece, in the region of Achaia. Macedonia is a region located in the northern part of Greece. The city of Thessalonica is in the region of Macedonia. Paul had visited the Macedonian region. We read about his visit in chapters 16-17 of the Book of Acts. The people of the region were very poor yet they also generously supported the work of the Gospel through Paul and his coworkers though he never asked for it from them (Philippians 4:10-18). They begged to be part of the collection Paul was taking for the Christians in Jerusalem who in their poverty needed support (2 Corinthians 8: 3-5). They had a spirit of "joyful generosity."

The congregation at Corinth had joined in a special effort to take a collection for the Jerusalem Christians. Now after a year they were losing their zeal for generosity. They had plenty (vs. 14), but lost interest in giving some of their own resources to others. They were struggling to find a joy in generosity.

We also learned from these chapters in Second Corinthians that Paul grounds generosity, especially financial giving, in the Gospel. He says, "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" (2 Cor 8:9). The Gospel produces the readiness in desire to give generously and find joy in generosity. Now, in the first part of chapter nine, Paul speaks more about a spirit of "prepared generosity."

In the first five verse of chapter nine Paul tells the Corinthian Christians to have a spirit of readiness or preparedness for contributing to the collection for the poor in Jerusalem. Here we see that generous financial giving and stewardship appears to flow from a willing heart and a spirit of readiness through Christ and the Gospel.

Indeed, in Ephesians 6:15, in the midst of encouraging the Ephesian Christians to put on the full armor of God, Paul says, “And, as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace.” In chapter eight of Second Corinthians, Paul says to them about their involvement in the Jerusalem collection, “So now finish doing it as well, so that your readiness in desiring it may be matched by your completing it out of what you have. For if the readiness is there, it is acceptable according to what a person has, not according to what he does not have” (2 Corinthians 8:11-12). Paul even goes on to say in verse four of our reading, “Otherwise, if some Macedonians come with me and find that you are not ready, we would be humiliated—to say nothing of you—for being so confident” (2 Corinthians 9:4). A spirit of “prepared generosity” and a readiness to be generous with all that the Lord has given to us.

So what does this emphasis on “prepared generosity” and a readiness to be generous have to do with us? How does it relate to stewardship? How does it connect with Mothers’ Day and home life? Perhaps at least in this way. A ready, prepared, and generous Christian steward is one who is firmly rooted in Christ and continues to put on the readiness given by the Gospel of Christ in Word and Sacrament. “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” (2 Corinthians 8:9). On Calvary our Lord poured out the riches of heaven as he offered his body and blood to prepare the way of salvation and purchase a place for you as a citizen of heaven. With a spirit of readiness and preparedness our Lord said in the Garden of Gethsemane on the night he was betrayed, “Not as I will, but as you will” (Matthew 26:39). With a ready and willing spirit he cried out on the cross, “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit” (Luke 23:46). The “prepared generosity” and ready spirit of our Lord.

And now our Lord he fills you with his ready and prepared spirit. The Holy Spirit. He fills you with his body and blood. He unites you to himself and clothes you in his in his righteousness. He fills your ears with the message of the Gospel and the comfort of the forgiveness of sins. He gives you fellow Christians who can encourage you in a spirit of readiness and preparedness in Christ. He surrounds you with Christians in the church, in the civil realm, and hopefully in the home, about whom we can say, “I am reminded of your sincere faith . . .” (2 Timothy 1:5).

And living in the generous grace of our Lord, who, with a ready and prepared spirit prepared the way of salvation for us and continues to keep us firm in the faith, you and I are prepared and ready to be generous with all that the Lord has given to us. Especially, together as God’s people in this place, let us commit with a ready and willing spirit to be even more generous with our financial tithes to support the work of the Gospel in our midst and within our community. Amen.