

“The Cheerful Giver”

Seventh Sunday after Easter

2 Corinthians 9:6-15

“For God loves a cheerful Giver” 2 Corinthians 9:7b

How are you doing with your Smarties? You remember Smarties, a row of multicolored, chalk-like, bite-size candies wrapped in clear plastic, about 15 pieces in a pack. They are perfect for sharing. I once heard a Pastor ask that question, “How are you doing with your Smarties?” to introduce a story about a young boy named Dustin and his Smarties.¹

Whenever the Pastor saw Dustin come into church with a fresh roll, he asked the boy if he could have one. Dustin became that Pastor’s Smarties hero. He peeled out a piece with a smile and handed it over gladly. This was surprising enough, but at that moment, something happened in this little boy’s heart. From that day on, for the next two years, every time Dustin got a pack of Smarties, he took out the first one and set it aside for the Pastor. Every Sunday, Dustin would track down his Pastor at church and generously offer him one or more Smarties. He did it gladly, with a smile, as if he enjoyed it.

As the Pastor tells the story, sometimes Dustin would open a pack of Smarties during the week, but he would still save the first round, sugary, chalky tablet in his pocket. By the time Sunday came, the Smarty was a little mangy and would have lint and other pocket paraphernalia stuck to it, but he never forgot to bring it for his Pastor. Dustin loved Smarties. He loved his Pastor. He loved sharing and took joy in the act of sharing. You could say he was a “cheerful giver.”

During these first three weeks in the month of May we have been learning more about the topic of faithful, Christ-centered stewardship with all that the Lord has entrusted to us, Smarties included. The Scripture readings that we have used as the basis for our sermons are chapters eight and nine of St. Paul’s Second Letter to the Corinthians. During the first week we looked at chapter eight and reflected on the theme, “Joyful Generosity.” Last week we looked at the first five verses of chapter nine and reflect on the theme, “Prepared Generosity.” This week we conclude our stewardship sermon series with the last ten verses of chapter nine and reflect on the theme, “The Cheerful Giver.”

As we have considered these two chapters during this sermon series we learned that Paul seizes the opportunity to speak to the Corinthian Christians about stewardship, particularly financial stewardship, in light of the collection that is being taken to support the Christians in Jerusalem who in their poverty needed support (2 Corinthians 8: 3-5). We learned that Paul contrasts the Corinthian Church’s attitude

¹ The following story about a boy and his smarties was first told by Rev. Kevin Harney of *Shorline Community Church* during a sermon.

toward such a project with the attitude of the Christians in the region of Macedonia. The Christians in Macedonia were finding joy in generosity whereas the Corinthians, like many of us at times, were struggling to find joy in generosity. The Christians in Corinth had joined in a special effort to take a collection for the Jerusalem Christians but were quickly losing interest. They were struggling to embrace a spirit of joyful, prepared generosity.

Now, in the second half of chapter nine Paul reminds the Corinthian Christians and us that all God's people of every time and place can be free to be cheerful, generous givers for primarily this one reason: "God's grace."

In the Bible the word, grace, can be defined as "unmerited favor and blessing from God." Particularly, the favor and blessing bestowed by God through his Son Jesus Christ in purchasing, winning, and delivering forgiveness of sins, eternal life, and salvation to sinners through faith in Christ alone. Perhaps you also have heard grace defined with an acronym using the five letters of the word: "**God's Riches At Christ's Expense.**" Or, as Paul put it in 2 Corinthians 8:9 "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."

God has poured out his riches through the "holy, precious blood and innocent suffering and death" of Christ (Luther's *Small Catechism*, "2nd Article of the Creed," *LSB* 323). He did it to show grace to you and me.

This grace of God is what brings forth joy in generosity. This grace of God brings forth preparedness and readiness in generosity. This grace of God motivates a cheerful giver. For, grace and joy are related. We remembered this truth when we considered chapter eight of Second Corinthians two weeks ago. The word for grace is χάρις (2 Corinthians 8:1, 9). The word for joy χαρᾶς (2 Corinthians 8:2). The two words sound alike. They share the same word stem. But joy or gladness for Christians is not just a matter of sound-alike word stems.

The grace of God is the key to our ability to be cheerful in giving and being generous with all the gifts that God has entrusted to us. Our cheerfulness as a giver is a result of being a new creature in Christ by God's grace. Our cheerfulness in giving a portion that God has given to us comes when we trust God's promises that he will care for us and we have no fear of releasing some of our riches to support the work of spreading to others God's grace through the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

What God did for the Macedonians and Corinthians he is able to do for and through the Christians of Atonement Lutheran! His grace is always abundant and enriching; it always leads to increase, not decrease—even when it involves parting with one's possessions! God's giving of his grace is the complete opposite of grudging and forced. In responding to it by generous and cheerful giving we find not only that, contrary to human probability, we have plenty for our own needs, but, far more, that we

are so enriched by God's grace as to be able constantly to abound in every kind of work and with anything that the Lord entrusts to us.² Yes, even with Smarties. Amen.

² An insight borrowed from Philip E. Hughes, *Commentary on the Second Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1962), pg. 332.