

Lamentations 3:22-33; Psalm 30;  
2 Corinthians 8:7-15; Mark 5:21-43

Grace to you and peace from God who is, who was, and who is to come. Amen.

Paul is the apostle to the Gentiles. He doesn't have any thing against the Hebrew people—he was one himself. But since he started off his career by hunting down, imprisoning, and often condoning the deaths those followers of the cult of Jesus, who more often than not were of Jewish heritage, you can safely say that he did not go over too well with the strictly Jewish crowd. He even went so far as to go from being called by that good Hebrew name of Saul, to being called by the not so Hebrew sounding name of Paul. This was not necessarily a Greek sounding name, but absolutely not a Hebrew sounding one, either.

But more than just a name change, Paul feels he is called to minister to those Gentile believers. Those who grew up NOT following the law of Moses. Those males who didn't have a certain little “snip-snip” operation when they were still a babe. Paul is to called to minister to the Gentiles. But he does so with the backing (which could also be read as “blessing”) of the original twelve back in Jerusalem. He was commissioned specifically, though, to take up a collection, an offering so to speak, to help out widows and children of believers back in Jerusalem.

This is a bit of a mandate to the church in general - to take care of those less fortunate than ourselves. In some respects this mandate that Paul is given is kind of like saying to us, ‘look around Camp Hill for those in need, and help them out.’ Since this is actually the Christian church based out of Jerusalem, composed mainly of Jewish believers, that are asking the rest of the church throughout Asia, especially asking the Gentile believers, to help out. We could equate this with the Republican party asking the Democratic party to help fund the campaign to elect a Republican official. Maybe you can begin to see a bit of the sticky situation Paul has gotten himself into.

Fortunately, for Paul, he has an “in.” Actually, he has a couple of “ins” with the folk in Corinth. First off, Paul is the human founder of that congregation. I'm using the term “congregation” here because I think that is how we would better understand it. If I talk about the “church” in Corinth, we tend to get the mental picture of a building. Something made out of brick and mortar, sandstone, or granite, or whatever they built large buildings out of during the first century Corinth. But the *congregation* there, in first century Corinth, was really what we would understand as a whole group of large Koininia groups meeting together throughout the city. Gatherings of perhaps 20-30 people, maybe a few more or less, would meet in a home of a believer who had a room, or courtyard, large enough to accommodate them. They would meet for worship and they would sing, read scripture, hear a message, and have a meal. Does that sound at all familiar?

The meal they would share would be an actual, real, meal. It would not be just flat bread and wine, because not all of those who gathered together had a enough food to survive on their own. They shared a meal together because they understood that eating together is a way to build friendship. Eating together is a way to build fellowship. It is a way to build community with one another. A “church,” as we in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century North America tend to understand that word, doesn’t come into existence until a couple of centuries after this letter is written. We associate that word with the physical structure, rather than with the people who make up a church.

Debbie Wilson, Judy Collins and I attended a conference a couple of weeks ago and there were several speakers at this conference who stressed the importance of community building and small groups, especially in large congregation. Because too often, people get lost in a congregation similar in size to ours. The flip side of that is that some people come to a large congregation precisely so that they can remain anonymous and not get involved. If you are one of those people, I would have to ask you “why do you do that?” But that’s a whole other sermon!

Paul is the human founder of this congregation in Corinth. He’s lived with them, he’s been there for a good deal of time and he knows them well. Second, when they started off, as a congregation, they were in financial need, and another congregation, specifically, the congregation of Macedonia (which we know today as Greece) the congregation in Macedonia, regardless of their own poverty, helped support financially the congregation there in Corinth. So now, Paul says to the Corinthians, ‘it’s your turn. There are those people in need, you no longer have that overwhelming need, and just as the Lord gave of himself, you too, Corinthians, are being asked to give of yourselves.’

An interesting thing, to me, that he does NOT say, is that he never mentions *tithing*. Why? Because, as he goes on to say, because he knows that people can, and often *will*, give more than a tithe, if asked to. The verse that opened up Chapter 8 this morning, Verse 3, says, “For, as I can testify, they voluntarily gave according to their means, and even beyond their means.” Give as you are able to give, Paul says to the congregation in Corinth.

We, as a congregation, as Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church, in Camp Hill, PA, part of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, do indeed a great job with giving to those in need. Just last year, in 2008, we ranked #75 of all the ELCA congregations (that’s #75 out of over 10,000 congregations) in the amount of benevolence that we gave. We gave over \$221,000 to our synod, to the national church, to disaster relief, and to many other ministries both here and around the world. I know only too well we are in ever toughening financial times, but did you pay attention to that closing verse of our second lesson today. “The one who had much did not have too much, and the one who had little did not have too little.”

I know that I have enough to pay my bills, at least at the moment. I also know I am far more in debt than I am comfortable with, even though I am trying to work my way clear. It seems that just about the time I am starting to get ahead then something else happens: the car breaks down; or I have to replace the garage roof; or we need to get some dental work done; or whatever. Then, I remember what we have and where we are financially. I go to a website that I’ve mentioned

before: Global Rich List ([www.globalrichlist.com](http://www.globalrichlist.com)). I type in our household income, and lo and behold, I see that the Brock household is #47,380,745 of the richest (that is, financially wealthiest) people in the world. That puts us in the top 0.78%. The Brock household, since we both work for nonprofit organizations, is nowhere close to breaking the six figures in our household annual income. When I type in just my income, I'm still in the top 1% of the world's wealthiest. So I dropped it down to \$10,000. That's \$10,000 annually. You'd be in the top 14% of the world's wealthiest people. How many of us could honestly say, or easily even attempt, to live on \$10,000 a year? So I kept looking. I was trying to figure out, What's the mid-way point? A \$1000 annual income, you're still in the top 45% of the world's wealthiest people. Fifty percent is \$850 a year. I can't pay my mortgage on \$850. I can barely make two car payments on my six-year old car with \$850.

“The one who had much did not have too much, and the one who had little did not have too little.”

One of the funny things here is that Paul is not really all that concerned about finances, but he's really more concerned with treating one another with respect, and grace and dignity. He is not interested in finances. He is not interested in what your IRS 1040 form says. Just like Jesus in the Gospel lesson was concerned when his cloak was touched. He was not concerned that power went out of him; he was concerned that someone was healed and he wanted to know who it was. He was concerned for the individual. Paul's not concerned with the Corinthians pocketbooks. He wants them to reach out in grace, and fellowship, and peace to other believers.

I really don't think that God is all that interested in how much we put in the offering plate, as God is interested in wanting to know **how** we give. How we give of our money? How we give of our time? How we give of our friendship to the congregation, to our neighbors, to our co-workers, to our classmates and to our families? Are we living, are you living, am I living, my life so I might excel in everything? Am I living so that I might excel in 'faith, in speech, in knowledge, in utmost eagerness, and in our love for each'?

God knows. Do you?

Amen.