

God's Generous Table

June 28, 2009

(Pentecost 4 - Year B)

2 Corinthians 8: 7-15

St. Alban's Episcopal Church, Waco, Texas

When I was growing up, we had two different choirs in our church. The senior choir was made up of adults. And the junior choir was made up of children and teenagers. The senior choir of adults always sang at the later service, at 11 o'clock. But the junior choir of young people always sang at the earlier service, at 9 o'clock. Growing up, my brother and I both sang in the junior choir.

Now once a year, on Easter, it was always a special occasion because both the junior and the senior choirs sang together on that one Sunday. Both of the choirs sang together at both the 9 o'clock and the 11 o'clock service. And between the two worship services, the adults in the senior choir brought food in for a big Easter breakfast.

I can remember one Easter breakfast in particular when I was about 12 or 13 years old. At the choir breakfast, I went up to the table in the choir room that was filled with goodies and treats. I walked up to the donuts that were in a box on the table and reached for a donut to put on my plate. And as I reached for the donut, one of the adult women in the senior choir ran up to me and swatted my hand. She reprimanded me, saying: "Those donuts are only for the adults. There are not enough donuts to share with the children."

I shrank back in disappointment. Yet I got the message, loud and clear, that the senior choir members did not think that there was enough for everyone.

I got the clear message that there were adults in my church who did not operate out of a sense of abundance, but who operated out of a sense of scarcity.

The Apostle Paul, in his writings in the Second Letter to the Corinthians, asks the people in the church in Corinth to operate out of a sense of abundance and generosity.

Paul has requested that the church in Corinth take up a cash collection. This collection will be given to the church in the homeland of Jerusalem. Yet, the Corinthians are dragging their feet on taking up this collection. The Corinthians are operating out of a sense of scarcity.

So the Apostle Paul reminds the Corinthians that the church in Macedonia, a church that did not have much in the way of money, was knocking the Corinthians socks off in the collection effort. As another fund raising tactic, Paul reminds the Corinthians that the Christian life is always about operating out of a sense of abundance, rather than out of a sense of scarcity.

Paul makes his point by writing this:

“For you know the generous act of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich.”

I am sure you have been to restaurants and homes where the table is filled with an abundance of heaping bowls of homegrown vegetables and with huge pieces of chicken fried steak that hang off the edge of the plate.

Such restaurants and homes do not operate out of sense of scarcity, but out of a sense of abundance.

Therefore, when Paul says that we are to remember the generous act of our Lord Jesus Christ,

Then I have in my mind a picture of Jesus, who operates completely out of a sense of abundance, rather than a sense of scarcity.

For Jesus says in the Gospel of Luke:

“Give, and it will be given to you.

A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap.”¹

Because Jesus’ abundant grace and love runs over and is poured into our lap.

Now, in contrast to my experience of scarcity as a young teenager in the church choir,

In contrast to that experience of having my hand slapped for reaching for a donut,

Last Sunday, I saw a different image, an image of abundance in the midst of our church family.

Last Sunday, we celebrated St. Alban’s Day.

We celebrated as a church family by having a burger and hot dog lunch in the parish hall.

We also celebrated by having ice cream sundaes.

And on the dessert table, there was a chocolate fountain.

This chocolate fountain on the dessert table had three tiers to it, and melted chocolate oozed down from one level to the next.

You could take a strawberry, or anything really, and hold it in the chocolate fountain to make an abundant, chocolate-y delight.

Last Sunday, every time I saw that chocolate fountain, I smiled.

The melted chocolate invited everyone to come up for a generous helping of decadence, as the chocolate gushed up in streams of joy.

This image of abundance reminds me of Jesus, who says in the Gospel of John:

“The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life.”²

The Apostle Paul wants the Corinthians to know that the church of Jesus is not a table with a skimpy box of donuts, reserved only for the grown-ups.

The church of Jesus is a table set with a chocolate fountain, abundantly

¹ Luke 6:38 (NIV)

² John 4:14

pouring out endless grace and love for everyone.
The church of Jesus is generous and abundant, because Jesus is generous and abundant.

Therefore, we are to be generous and abundant, as well.

When I was without a job for three years so that I could attend seminary, during those years, I became a better tipper to waiters and waitresses at restaurants.

Before that time, I would calculate a strict 15% of the food bill. And sometimes I would pay even less than 15%, if the waiter had made a mistake in the order.

However, while I was a seminary student, our family was dependent on the generosity and gifts of others.

Therefore, I believe that has made me become more generous.

I think that it is fun to give, and to let other people have an experience of abundance and grace.

I invite you to do the same - and leave a 20 to 25% tip sometime at a restaurant.

When you see the smile on that waitress' face, you will see a picture of what it looks like for someone to receive grace.

You will see on that waiter's face the God of generosity and grace.

Now sometimes I do not operate out of a sense of abundance, but of scarcity.

At dinner parties, I have watched the bread basket go around the table, And I have caught myself wondering if there will be enough dinner rolls when the basket comes around to me.

For we all live in a world where a sense of scarcity is the norm.

Yet the Apostle Paul tells the Corinthians, and us, that we are to be generous.

We are to be generous because God is generous, through the generous act of our Lord Jesus Christ.

So leave a hefty tip at the restaurant.
Give sacrificially to this church.

Share your abundance with the poor.
Don't tell children that there aren't enough donuts,
But dip red strawberries into an abundant chocolate fountain.

Because at God's generous table,
Bread hangs off the plate.
Wine gushes up.
And grace pours into your lap.

AMEN.

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