



Liturgical Day: All Saints Day
Date: November 2, 2008
Sermon Title: Now

*Hungry, broken, lost;
Blessed, the children of God;
Sacred healing grace.*

Grace to you and peace, from God our Father, and the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

"The Abundant Life." That's what we're all after, right? That's the American dream, right? We all want to enjoy the abundance that is available to hard working Americans in our day. But I'm wondering what it is that makes for abundant living. How might I know, if I start to experience abundance? What are the signs that my lifestyle is abundant? I want to take a minute and gather some responses from you. Steve/Rick will record them on the screen behind me. How would you answer the following question: "What are the *signs of abundance*?"

[Take a few minutes to allow for people's responses.]

Given those descriptions of abundance, how many of you here this morning think of yourselves as abundant? *[Look for a show of hands.]*

In his second letter to the Corinthian Christians, Paul writes about abundance. And he talks about it in two different ways. He refers to the material abundance that is found in Corinth during those days. Corinth was a well-placed shipping port, and it eventually turned into a very wealthy community. It was populated by importers and retailers and artisans and collectors. The Corinthians – even the Corinthian Christians – were living in unprecedented luxury. They were living what the first century would have certainly called the abundant life.

The people of Corinth may have been enjoying material abundance, but Paul is more impressed with the people of Macedonia. They were not as wealthy as the people of Corinth. As a matter of fact, Paul describes them as being in the midst of "a severe ordeal of affliction." They are living in "extreme poverty." Yet they were enjoying a different sort of abundance. Paul described them as being filled with an abundance of joy. They had experienced the grace of God. They had come to know Jesus as their Savior. Through their faith, they receive the gift of forgiveness and the promise of eternity, and it had changed their lives. It grounded them in hope. It filled them with joy.

The interesting thing is this: when Paul went to work, collecting money to bring relief to the Christian saints in Jerusalem who were suffering a great deal, it was the church in Macedonia that responded. As a matter of fact, they were eager to help, and begged Paul to include them in his plans to assist the saints. Their abundant joy caused them to ignore their extreme poverty, and resulted in a wealth of generosity on their part.

At the same time, the Corinthians, with all their good intentions, promised to be supportive of this venture. Paul and Titus had placed the request before them as much as a year before this

FIRST LESSON
REVELATION 7:9-17

PSALM
PSALM 34:1-10, 22

SECOND LESSON
1 JOHN 3:1-3

GOSPEL LESSON
ST. MATTHEW 5:1-12

STEWARDSHIP TEXT
2 CORINTHIANS 8:1-16

PRAYER OF THE DAY
ALMIGHTY GOD, YOU HAVE
KNIT YOUR PEOPLE TOGETHER IN
ONE COMMUNION IN THE
MYSTICAL BODY OF YOUR SON,
JESUS CHRIST OUR LORD. GRANT
US GRACE TO FOLLOW YOUR
BLESSED SAINTS IN LIVES OF FAITH
AND COMMITMENT, AND TO
KNOW THE INEXPRESSIBLE JOYS
YOU HAVE PREPARED FOR THOSE
WHO LOVE YOU, THROUGH
JESUS CHRIST, OUR SAVIOR AND
LORD, WHO LIVES AND REIGNS
WITH YOU AND THE HOLY SPIRIT,
ONE GOD, NOW AND FOREVER.
AMEN.

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letter was written. But in the twelve months in between, they just never got around to it. They let other interests distract them. It slipped their mind. They never followed through on their intentions. So Paul challenged them to think about what it meant that they lived in the midst of such abundance. And he instructed them that it wasn't enough to have good intentions. It wasn't enough to plan to do something some day. The need was great in Jerusalem, Corinth had the ability to make a difference, they needed to reach out, and they needed to reach out now.

This is where Paul makes a very interesting reversal in today's text. He began by considering the material abundance of the Corinthian Church, which he saw as a potential source of support for the saints in Jerusalem. Now he turns it around, and considers the spiritual abundance of the Macedonian church, which he saw as a potential source of inspiration for the saints in Corinth.

I like reading this text on All Saints Sunday. It is not the text appointed for this day. We chose it to go along with our Stewardship Appeal. But it does provide a hint or two about what a Saint is:

- A saint is someone who has been forgiven – who has been renewed – by Jesus Christ.
- A saint is someone whose life is filled with abundant joy.
- A saint is someone who, even in the midst of extreme poverty, demonstrates a wealth of generosity.
- A saint is someone whose love is genuine, and is seen in the earnest way in which they offer themselves to others.
- A saint is someone who gives eagerly, and whose gift reflects the love and gratitude they have for God.

Most of all, a saint is an example – an inspiration – to the rest of us. Paul uses the example of the immediate response and the generosity he saw in Macedonia to stir the Corinthians to faithfulness. So too today, God uses the examples of these same saints to stir you and me to be more generous, more loving, more compassionate, more prompt and more faithful.

The truth is: we are all saints – we have all been washed clean by Christ. Paul addresses this letter to the Saints at Corinth. Despite their unwillingness to make a quick response to the need in Jerusalem, Paul understands that they are forgiven by Christ, and in God's eyes, are covered by the righteousness of Jesus. That is why Paul is able to address them as Saints. A Saint is one who has been forgiven – made perfect in God's eyes – by what Jesus has done. In that regard, the Corinthians, even in their neglect of the situation in Jerusalem, are saints.

But in addition to that, we are all called to saintly living – called to be faithful examples to the world of what can happen when the Gospel of Jesus Christ takes hold of our hearts, and stirs us to faithfulness. The Macedonians are a powerful example of what that looks like when it happens. The Corinthians are an example of what it looks like when people are still waiting for God to stir their hearts.

Today is the last day in our five-week long emphasis on Stewardship. We started out talking about the anxiety that can arise when the church starts talking about money. It is a natural anxiety – after all, we're only human. But it is an anxiety that can be overcome. It is overcome, first of all, by becoming sacrificial givers: by giving enough that it actually makes a difference in our monthly budget. That may sound harsh to someone who hasn't experienced it. But I can assure you of this: everyone I know who has grown into being a sacrificial giver receives a peace in their heart when they know they are doing their best for God. (And when there is peace in our hearts, there is no room left for anxiety.) That peace leads to an enthusiasm about generosity, and an enthusiasm about ministry, that those who are stingy givers never experience. That's what we want for you all – we want you to be filled with peace and enthusiasm when you think about what we

accomplish as a congregation – and that’s why I want to encourage you to start right now. Don’t wait around for another time, like the Corinthians did. But start giving sacrificially now. Make a strong commitment to support the life of this congregation in 2009. As a matter of fact, don’t even wait for January. If you feel like God is calling you to give at a higher level, do it now. Start today – or start next Sunday, when we all bring our commitments to support Saint Peter up to the altar, and dedicate them to God.

Many of you have been an inspiration to me. I am often in awe when I consider how committed you are to this congregation and its ministries, and how much you give to make them possible. Now let us together be an inspiration to all who look at us and wonder what stands at the heart of who we are. Let’s show them that we are a community which is grounded in the promise of Christ and in the power of God; a community made up of people who offer a wealth of generosity to make our proclamation of the Gospel as strong as it can possibly be.

I’m very excited about 2009. I think it is going to be another great year at Saint Peter. I know that God has great things in store for us. And I know that each of you will do your very best to make it happen. Thanks for your partnership in the Gospel. Now is the time to commit ourselves to the future of this congregation. Now is the time to respond to God’s grace. Let us do it together, with strength and enthusiasm. May God bless our efforts.

Amen.

David J. Risendal, Pastor (November 2, 2008)

Stewardship Lesson (English Text):

^{8:1} We want you to know, brothers and sisters, about the grace of God that has been granted to the churches of Macedonia; ² for during a severe ordeal of affliction, their abundant joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part. ³ For, as I can testify, they voluntarily gave according to their means, and even beyond their means, ⁴ begging us earnestly for the privilege of sharing in this ministry to the saints— ⁵ and this, not merely as we expected; they gave themselves first to the Lord and, by the will of God, to us, ⁶ so that we might urge Titus that, as he had already made a beginning, so he should also complete this generous undertaking among you. ⁷ Now as you excel in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in utmost eagerness, and in our love for you—so we want you to excel also in this generous undertaking.

⁸ I do not say this as a command, but I am testing the genuineness of your love against the earnestness of others. ⁹ 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. ¹⁰ And in this matter I am giving my advice: it is appropriate for you who began last year not only to do something but even to desire to do something— ¹¹ now finish doing it, so that your eagerness may be matched by completing it according to your means. ¹² For if the eagerness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has—not according to what one does not have. ¹³ I do not mean that there should be relief for others and pressure on you, but it is a question of a fair balance between ¹⁴ your present abundance and their need, so that their abundance may be for your need, in order that there may be a fair balance. ¹⁵ As it is written,

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

Stewardship Lesson (Greek Text):

^{8:1} Γνωρίζομεν δὲ ὑμῖν, ἀδελφοί, τὴν χάριν τοῦ θεοῦ τὴν δεδομένην ἐν ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις τῆς Μακεδονίας, ² ὅτι ἐν πολλῇ δοκιμῇ θλίψεως ἢ περισσεΐα τῆς χαρᾶς αὐτῶν καὶ ἡ κατὰ βάθους πτωχεία

ⁱ 2nd Corinthians 8:1-16, New Revised Standard Version Bible (© 1989, Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America).

αὐτῶν ἐπερίσσευσεν εἰς τὸ πλοῦτος τῆς ἀπλότητος αὐτῶν· ³ὅτι κατὰ δύναμιν, μαρτυρῶ, καὶ παρὰ δύναμιν, αὐθαίρετοι ⁴μετὰ πολλῆς παρακλήσεως δεόμενοι ἡμῶν τὴν χάριν καὶ τὴν κοινωνίαν τῆς διακονίας τῆς εἰς τοὺς ἁγίους, ⁵καὶ οὐ καθὼς ἠλπίσαμεν ἀλλὰ ἑαυτοὺς ἔδωκαν πρῶτον τῷ κυρίῳ καὶ ἡμῖν διὰ θελήματος θεοῦ ⁶εἰς τὸ παρακαλέσαι ἡμᾶς τίτον, ἵνα καθὼς προενήρξατο οὕτως καὶ ἐπιτελέσῃ εἰς ὑμᾶς καὶ τὴν χάριν ταύτην. ⁷Ἄλλ' ὥσπερ ἐν παντὶ περισσεύετε, πίστει καὶ λόγῳ καὶ γνώσει καὶ πάσῃ σπουδῇ καὶ τῇ ἐξ ἡμῶν ἐν ὑμῖν ἀγάπῃ, ἵνα καὶ ἐν ταύτῃ τῇ χάριτι περισσεύητε.

⁸Οὐ κατ' ἐπιταγὴν λέγω ἀλλὰ διὰ τῆς ἐτέρων σπουδῆς καὶ τὸ τῆς ὑμετέρας ἀγάπης γνήσιον δοκιμάζων· ⁹γινώσκετε γὰρ τὴν χάριν τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, ὅτι δι' ὑμᾶς ἐπτώχευσεν πλούσιος ὢν, ἵνα ὑμεῖς τῇ ἐκείνου πτωχεία πλουτήσητε. ¹⁰καὶ γνώμην ἐν τούτῳ δίδωμι· τοῦτο γὰρ ὑμῖν συμφέρει, οἷτινες οὐ μόνον τὸ ποιῆσαι ἀλλὰ καὶ τὸ θέλειν προενήρξασθε ἀπὸ πέρυσι. ¹¹νυνὶ δὲ καὶ τὸ ποιῆσαι ἐπιτελέσατε, ὅπως καθάπερ ἡ προθυμία τοῦ θέλειν, οὕτως καὶ τὸ ἐπιτελέσαι ἐκ τοῦ ἔχειν. ¹²εἰ γὰρ ἡ προθυμία πρόκειται, καθὸ ἐὰν ἔχη εὐπρόσδεκτος, οὐ καθὸ οὐκ ἔχει. ¹³οὐ γὰρ ἵνα ἄλλοις ἄνεσις, ὑμῖν θλίψις, ἀλλ' ἐξ ἰσότητος. ¹⁴ἐν τῷ νῦν καιρῷ τὸ ὑμῶν περισσευμα εἰς τὸ ἐκείνων ὑστέρημα, ἵνα καὶ τὸ ἐκείνων περισσευμα γένηται εἰς τὸ ὑμῶν ὑστέρημα, ὅπως γένηται ἰσότης, ¹⁵καθὼς γέγραπται·

ὁ τὸ πολὺ οὐκ ἐπλεόνασεν,
καὶ ὁ τὸ ὀλίγον οὐκ ἠλαττόνησεν. ⁱⁱ

All Saints Gospel (English Text): ⁱⁱⁱ

^{5.1} When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain; and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. ² Then he began to speak, and taught them, saying: ³ "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. ⁴ Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. ⁵ Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. ⁶ Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. ⁷ Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy. ⁸ Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. ⁹ Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God. ¹⁰ Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. ¹¹ Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. ¹² Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you. ^{iv}

All Saints Gospel (Greek Text):

^{5.1} ἰδὼν δὲ τοὺς ὄχλους ἀνέβη εἰς τὸ ὄρος, καὶ καθίσαντος αὐτοῦ προσῆλθαν αὐτῷ οἱ μαθηταὶ αὐτοῦ· καὶ ² ἀνοίξας τὸ στόμα αὐτοῦ ἐδίδασκεν αὐτοὺς λέγων· ³ Μακάριοι οἱ πτωχοὶ τῷ πνεύματι, ὅτι αὐτῶν ἐστὶν ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν. ⁴ μακάριοι οἱ πενθούντες, ὅτι αὐτοὶ παρακληθήσονται. ⁵ μακάριοι οἱ πραεῖς, ὅτι αὐτοὶ κληρονομήσουσιν τὴν γῆν. ⁶ μακάριοι οἱ πεινῶντες καὶ διψῶντες τὴν δικαιοσύνην, ὅτι αὐτοὶ χορτασθήσονται. ⁷ μακάριοι οἱ ἐλεήμονες, ὅτι αὐτοὶ ἐλεηθήσονται. ⁸ μακάριοι οἱ καθαροὶ τῆς καρδίας, ὅτι αὐτοὶ τὸν θεὸν ὄψονται. ⁹ μακάριοι οἱ εἰρηνοποιοί, ὅτι αὐτοὶ υἱοὶ θεοῦ κληθήσονται. ¹⁰ μακάριοι οἱ δεδιωγμένοι ἕνεκεν δικαιοσύνης, ὅτι αὐτῶν ἐστὶν ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν. ¹¹ μακάριοι ἐστε ὅταν ὀνειδίσωσιν ὑμᾶς καὶ διώξωσιν καὶ εἴπωσιν πᾶν πονηρὸν καθὸ ὑμῶν [ψευδόμενοι] ἕνεκεν ἐμοῦ. ¹² χαίrete καὶ ἀγαλλιᾶσθε, ὅτι ὁ μισθὸς ὑμῶν πολὺς ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς· οὕτως γὰρ ἐδίωξαν τοὺς προφῆτας τοὺς πρὸ ὑμῶν. ^v

ⁱⁱ 2nd Corinthians 8:1-16, The Greek New Testament, Aland, Kurt, Black, Matthew, Martini, Carlo M., Metzger, Bruce M., and Wikgren, Allen, (© 1983, Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft Stuttgart).

ⁱⁱⁱ A list of Bible lessons for the coming weeks is available at www.elca.org/dcm/worship/church_year/lectionary.html

^{iv} St. Matthew 5:1-12, New Revised Standard Version Bible (© 1989, Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America).

^v St. Matthew 5:1-12, The Greek New Testament, Aland, Kurt, Black, Matthew, Martini, Carlo M., Metzger, Bruce M., and Wikgren, Allen, (© 1983, Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft Stuttgart).