

10.18.26 ~ Pentecost 21
“A Generous Harvest for Others”
The United Baptist Church, Annandale, VA

Words of Generosity

Psalm 107:1-9, 35-38 ^{NLT}

Pew Bible 526, 527

- ¹ Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good!
His faithful love endures forever.
- ² Has the Lord redeemed you? Then speak out!
Tell others he has redeemed you from your enemies.
- ³ For he has gathered the exiles from many lands,
from east and west,
from north and south.
- ⁴ Some wandered in the wilderness,
lost and homeless.
- ⁵ Hungry and thirsty,
they nearly died.
- ⁶ “Lord, help!” they cried in their trouble,
and he rescued them from their distress.
- ⁷ He led them straight to safety,
to a city where they could live.
- ⁸ Let them praise the Lord for his great love
and for the wonderful things he has done for them.
- ⁹ For he satisfies the thirsty
and fills the hungry with good things.
- ³⁵ But he also turns deserts into pools of water,
the dry land into springs of water.
- ³⁶ He brings the hungry to settle there
and to build their cities.
- ³⁷ They sow their fields, plant their vineyards,
and harvest their bumper crops.
- ³⁸ How he blesses them!
They raise large families there,
and their herds of livestock increase.

Leader: These Are the Words of God. People: Thanks be to God!

Words of Instruction

2 Corinthians 9:10-15 ^{NLT}

Pew Bible 1009

- ¹⁰ For God is the one who provides seed for the farmer and then bread to eat. In the same way, he will provide and increase your resources and then produce a great harvest of generosity in you.
- ¹¹ Yes, you will be enriched in every way so that you can always be generous. And when we take your gifts to those who need them, they will thank God. ¹² So two good things will result from this ministry of giving—the needs of the believers in Jerusalem will be met, and they will joyfully express their thanks to God.

¹³ As a result of your ministry, they will give glory to God. For your generosity to them and to all believers will prove that you are obedient to the Good News of Christ. ¹⁴ And they will pray for you with deep affection because of the overflowing grace God has given to you. ¹⁵ Thank God for this gift too wonderful for words!

Leader: These Are the Words of Paul. People: Thanks be to God!

Please pray with me:

Generous and giving God, we come together to worship, hear your word, and have fellowship with you and one another. We thank you for another full week of living, working, praying, serving others, and celebrating life's wonders. We noticed your creation this week in the changing colors of leaves, dramatic weather, and all you provide us, and for your blessings we are grateful. Help us to find more time to study and apply your word throughout the week. Open our minds to creative resources for both the church and the stranger, inviting others to know you and to meet you here. Speak through this message and messenger. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

Happy Fall! Or should I say Autumn! It seems we turned a seasonal corner, so if you need a quilt or prayer shawl, there are some on the middle pews at the door entrance. As you pulled in you saw the temporary air conditioning chiller was removed this week and the heat will be turned on Wednesday. Thank you to Kyle for stopping by this week in his capacity as Building and Grounds Chair.

I bring you greetings from NorthStar Church Network staff and member churches yesterday for their Annual Celebration. It was a time of worship, praise, and reports about the Kingdom work all 142 churches are doing around our region. I reunited with many of our Israel trip pastors and wives including Francis Phan from the Vietnamese Gospel Baptist Church. Although there is a little room for classic, traditional church style, I saw new energy, young leadership, and wise mentorship growing strong and working together within NorthStar. This year's emphasis on over 160 community service projects within the membership gave me lots of ideas; our collaborative Food Mission was highlighted, and they are

giving each church represented yesterday \$100.00 to put toward a favorite ministry, so give me your suggestions if you choose other than the Food Mission (I didn't want to decide for you), but I have to reply tomorrow.

We have been learning about stewardship the last few weeks, so their gift is a practical example of giving to others. Our Mission Center space donations are reciprocal ways the church gives beyond its financial contributions. We discussed missions giving, being responsible with our expenditures, sharing our time and talents, and of course we learned the Old and New Testament history of tithing. But we haven't yet spoken about Benevolence, so sorry, I added another week and message to our stewardship theme.

Historically and overall, even now, The United Baptist Church is a generous and giving church to folks who need a little help. We have a foundation, an Endowment Fund, and a separate Benevolence account from which to draw needed funds responsibly. The two large funds have committees that manage requests or suggestions. For Benevolence, as your pastor, I pray with requestors, hear their stories, track our giving so that we're not taken advantage of, and discern what, how much, or how we can assist if at all. Sometimes their need is not about money; I try to help them connect to community resources or explain how the Food Mission works, or the local shelters that are available. I must say it is getting more difficult with fewer congregants and greater need, but we still assist many, thanks to your weekly donations in the separate offering plate. Even change or a dollar or two helps us help someone else. A couple of our neighbors give to that account as well. The Food Mission collaboration has helped a lot to channel our giving, space, and time.

As we did last week, today, we must praise and thank God for the blessings we have. And as you get frustrated by the many intersection panhandlers, just take a moment to lift a prayer of gratitude for your own circumstances, even if they feel insufficient and then pray for that individual. Some are sincere and in great need while I realize others are “travelers” or scammers hired to abuse our compassion. Do you speak to them? Many won’t look you in the eye as they smoke expensive cigarettes or smell like alcohol. I came up with a new phrase to share encouragement with the ones who really need faith: “No matter your circumstances, God loves you.” They often say to me “God bless you” as their gratitude. God promises love, grace, and mercy.

Psalm 107 is a psalm of praise for rescuing the lost, provisional needs and caring for the needy. The Israelites had wandered in the wilderness, and some scholars say this was written while exiled in Babylon. They had little food or water, missed God, and were disheartened. They cried out to God both spiritually and physically. This psalm like so many uses rich language, imagery that sparks the imagination: rich and abundant deserts, curative waters, planted fields, fruits aplenty filling the new cities. What does this psalm say to the church? Yes, we are sometimes cynical in our “pull yourself up by your bootstraps” American mentality. Perhaps that is why some lament language opens up the psalm to keep us humble. It is a healthy paradox, a both/and situation rather than either/or. We are not either rich or poor; most citizens are both blessed and in need depending on family health and priorities. But it is not our job to decide worthiness of our generosity. It is our responsibility to pray for those in need and let Jesus tug at their

consciences. Why do we fear the poor and destitute? Sometimes they are rude, offensive, or mentally ill. Can we overlook that to see them as children of God? And do we trust God in our own lives for provision?

The apostle Paul in the chapter before ours for today is instructing his disciples about the collection for the poor in Jerusalem. The rewards for giving to others, (what we call benevolence, some call charity) are threefold: 1.) givers are enriched spiritually, emotionally, and sometimes physically; 2.) receivers' needs are met; and 3.) God is praised and glorified as the source of all blessings. Righteous, generous giving and living brings about eternal rewards as well. Generosity is also contagious, in a good way, not like the flu! People give more when surrounded by others who are giving. Perceived givers usually end up with multiplied blessings and more to give. Paul's collection would meet the needs of the Jerusalem Christians, have leftover funds to give to the poor, and also would demonstrate their praise and gratitude to God. The Corinthians would benefit by giving to the collection, but not from a conditional perspective. Paul was not teaching they had to give but trying to help them trust God more. His hope and mine is that every gift is a transformational opportunity to heal hearts or secure one's right relationship with God and his generosity. You see, our generosity is a true reflection of God's generosity to us! Paul also speaks of the connection within the broader community through prayer. Giving to others unconditionally creates a path toward intercession and gratitude, especially when someone is in despair. Who might you encourage today? If not personally comfortable giving, let us do it on your behalf by donating to the Benevolence Fund. And always pray for the recipients as

we do on Sandwich making day. God knows their difficult circumstances of health issues, lack of food, resources, transportation, or mental health struggles. He can provide sustenance for those in need **through you**. And let me say “thank you” on their behalf for what you are already doing!

This too is missions work, Kingdom work! Amen? Amen. ||

Please pray with me: Thank you Lord for the guidance you give us through your Scriptures each week. May we never forget that you have called us into relationship first, service second, and glory last. Help us to stay close to your word and world through our actions. Transform our hearts and habits, Lord, to be generous givers and stewards, sharing our resources with others. Keep our eyes upon you and your mission; guide our steps. We pray these things in Jesus’ name, Amen.