# Congregational-Presbyterian Church

 **“The Gift of Myself”**

**2 Corinthians 8:1-7**

**October 13, 2019**

God’s Word has much to say about money and how God wants us to use it. This will be the focus of our four-week sermon series on stewardship. My hope is that you are using the Bible Reading Plan where the twenty-four biblical passages during these four weeks deal with the topic of how we manage our financial resources. If you did not pick up the new Bible Reading Plan bookmark last week, it is in your pews this morning.

Our sermon text today comes from Paul’s second letter to the church in Corinth. In the passage he references a collection of money being gathered for the Christians in Jerusalem. They were in need due to being persecuted for their faith and because of a drought in the area that had produced severe famine. Early on the Corinthian church had been eager to help, but they were not following through with their commitment. So, Paul writes them and urges them to once again turn their attention to this offering, speaking to them about God’s grace – the grace that had been at work among the Macedonian churches who, out of their gratitude for God’s graciousness to them, gave generously to their fellow believers in Jerusalem. I invite you to turn with me to 2 Corinthians 8:1-7

Now I want you to know, dear brothers and sisters, what God in his kindness has done through the churches in Macedonia. They are being tested by many troubles, and they are very poor. But they are also filled with abundant joy, which has overflowed in rich generosity. For I can testify that they gave not only what they could afford, but far more. And they did it of their own free will. They begged us again and again for the privilege of sharing in the gift for the believers in Jerusalem. They even did more than we had hoped, for their first action was to give themselves to the Lord and to us, just as God wanted them to do. So we have urged Titus, who encouraged your giving in the first place, to return to you and encourage you to finish this ministry of giving. Since you excel in so many ways—in your faith, your gifted speakers, your knowledge, your enthusiasm, and your love from us—I want you to excel also in this gracious act of giving.

The Macedonian churches that Paul is referring to included those in Philippi and Thessalonica. The book of Acts tells us what happened to Paul in those towns where, years before, he had preached the gospel. In Philippi he and Silas were beaten and jailed for driving out an evil spirit from a slave girl. In Thessalonica the believers snuck Paul out of town at night because earlier that day a mob had rushed the home where Paul was staying, seeking to do him harm. It is likely that the same hostility that met Paul was still affecting the Christians, causing the troubles and poverty that Paul refers to in our passage. Yet, out of the difficulties of their situation, they asked – we could even say they insisted – to be able to contribute to the needs of their brothers and sisters in Jerusalem. What led to such willing, cheerful and generous action on their behalf? Paul gives us the answer: “They gave themselves first to the Lord.” And that is the key to Christian giving. Before any electronic transfer is implemented, before any check is written and placed in the offering plate, before any financial commitment card is filled out, give yourself first to the Lord.

What does it mean to give yourself first to the Lord? It means to trust him first. It means to trust that his grace is enough for all your needs, including your financial needs. He has already given himself to us in his Son, Jesus Christ. Now, as Paul points out in his letter to the Romans, won’t he also give us all good things? Having given us Christ to meet our deepest need which is forgiveness for our sin, why doubt that he will give us our daily bread. As the Gospel of Matthew tells us, Jesus pointed to the birds of the air and the lilies of the field and asked whether or not the God who cares for them would not much more care for each one of us.

One reason that many of us struggle with giving is that our hearts are divided. Yes, we do trust in God, but we also trust the comfort a regular income brings. We trust the Lord’s guidance, but we also trust our own wisdom. We trust that the Lord will provide for our future, but we also trust investments, dividends, and compound interest to see us through. We have given ourselves to God, but we have also given ourselves to what our world offers. We try to serve two masters, and Jesus clearly said that won’t work. There is nothing wrong with regular income, human wisdom, and wise investing for the future, but these things must all be secondary. When we first trust God completely, giving ourselves fully to him, then we need not trust anything that is secondary. We can put secondary things to good use, but we don’t give ourselves to them.

Paul began by talking about what the grace of God had done among the Macedonian believers, and he closed by encouraging excellence among the Corinthian Christians in the gracious ministry of giving. When we give ourselves first to the Lord, trusting him to provide all we need, we will be free to give to the ministry of our church out of gratitude for his grace.