

Harvests of Blessing
LaGrave Christian Reformed Church
April 28, 2019 – AM Sermon
Rev. Peter Jonker
2 Corinthians 9:6-15

Our passage comes right after Paul's plea for money. Paul just finished calling the Corinthian church to give to the poor in Jerusalem. He's not subtle. He said, 'I already told the Macedonians what incredible givers you are, don't embarrass me.' In our passage he's finished the direct plea, and now he goes down a little deeper and talks about the heart of giving, the heart of blessing. As I read, notice the three parts in the text: The way to bless (6-7), the source of blessing (8-11), and the result of blessing (12-15).

So today we are going to talk about blessing. The GEMS theme for the year is '*Be a Blessing*' and the theme verse is verse 8 of our passage. "*God is able to bless you abundantly. So that in all things, at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work.*" The passage is a call for us to be people of blessing. To try to explain blessing, Paul compares blessing others to farming. Paul uses farming imagery. He talks about planting and harvest. Paul wants you to be a blessing farmer. Just as a wheat farmer will sow wheat in his field so that he can reap a big harvest of wheat in the fall, so God calls us to sow our blessings so that when the harvest time comes we will have a great harvest blessing. Our blessings are like seeds, and God wants us to sow them so that we will enlarge the harvest of our righteousness. So we are all blessing farmers. I am a blessing farmer. You GEMS are blessing farmers. Everyone in this room is a blessing farmer. We're all trying to grow a harvest of blessing.

How can we become good blessing farmers? How do we make sure that we have a good harvest? I think Paul gives us some ideas about that in our passage. You might say Paul gives farming tips for blessing farmers. I want to look at Paul's farming tips so that we can be good blessing farmers. Looking at what Paul wrote I think that a blessing farmer could approach her work in three different ways.

First, you could be a blessing farmer who refuses to plant. Instead of planting your blessing by sharing it with others, you could say to yourself, "No Thank You! I don't want to share these blessings. I like these blessings! I want to keep them for

myself!” That’s like a wheat farmer who looks at his wheat seed and says, “I don’t want to sow this seed! This is good seed! I could make bread for myself out of this seed. I could grind this into flour and make myself a yummy cake! I’m not going to sow this seed; I’m going to keep it all for myself.” Now obviously a farmer who does this would not last very long. Paul says whoever sows sparingly will reap sparingly. Whoever sows nothing, will reap nothing at all. A farmer who did this with their seed would soon be out of business.

You might think that no one would ever farm this way, but people do. There are people who say that sharing is foolish. Sharing is weak. Everyone should be selfish. Everyone should get as much for herself as she possibly can and never sacrifice. Paul thinks that’s bad farming. Paul thinks that any crop you get that way will be empty. You might get rich living like that. You might get powerful living like that. You might have lots of stuff living like that. But you won’t have any blessing. In order for something to be a blessing it needs to have love in it. Without love, money and stuff aren’t blessings; they are just things to worry about. And you can’t have love without sharing and sacrifice. Sharing and sacrifice are the main ingredients of God’s love. You can’t grow blessing by keeping it all for yourself.

Second, you could be a blessing farmer who practices reluctant blessing. Reluctant blessing is when you plant some of your blessings, but you only sow what you absolutely have to. You sow your blessing, you share it, but, in Paul’s words, you do it under compulsion. You share what you have, but you don’t do it with excitement or joy or interest; you do it because you know that’s what’s expected of you.

What’s this like? It’s like paying your taxes. I paid my taxes just a few weeks ago as did many of you. I had a big bill this year, which was not good news. I paid it, but I didn’t pay joyfully. Or how about a more churchy example of reluctant blessing. Maybe you volunteer to teach the three year olds in our church school. You don’t really have any particular interest in teaching three year olds, but your Mom’s been bugging you and you need some service learning credit for school so you volunteer. When you’re down there you give yourself, but you do it sparingly. You let someone else read the Bible story. You don’t really try to engage the kids; you just sort of make sure they don’t break anything or kill each other. You let the other volunteers do all the creative work. After a half hour in the room you’re already looking at your watch praying that Reverend Jonker won’t go too long this

morning. Do you sow blessing in that scenario? Sure. The three year olds get a class. You filled in a volunteer slot. But you have sown sparingly, and I promise you, you will reap sparingly. Neither you nor the kids will be much blessed by your volunteer work because it was, as Paul says, reluctant. Under compulsion.

So far, we have two kinds of blessing farmers. We have the farmer who hoards her blessing and gives nothing. Disaster. You have the reluctant farmer who sows sparingly...and ends up with a small, lukewarm harvest. Now we get to the third kind of blessing farmer, the one who practices joyful blessing. This farmer sows generously. When she gives out blessing it comes from her heart! She does it joyfully, not reluctantly. She gives abundantly. She overflows. Overflow is the key word here. This blessing farmer doesn't just give people what they deserve, this blessing farmer doesn't just give people what's expected, this blessing farmer doesn't just give others the blessing that seems reasonable, they overflow. They give more. They give extra. They go the extra mile, and they do it with joy. The Bible has a word for blessing that overflows like that. That word is grace. Grace is unmerited favor given in love, and when that kind of blessing comes in your life, it overflows into great harvests of righteousness.

Let me give a concrete example of this kind of blessing farming and the harvests it brings. This is a true story I heard from a person I met just a little while ago. Let's call him Frank. Frank did not grow up a Christian. He grew up as a person who didn't really believe in much of anything. He described himself as a decent guy, but also a guy who could be a little pugnacious. He had a quick temper and could get into fights. But in his early 20's he became a Christian. He accepted Jesus and his attitude began to change. He started to learn the way of blessing and grace. Just a couple of years after he became a Christian, he was in line at a really busy poutine restaurant at lunchtime. (Poutine is a Canadian delicacy – it's made with a base of French fries, cheese curds and gravy, and you can add other ingredients). He was there with some of his old unbelieving friends – the ones he used to run around with. They had already been waiting in line for a while when a really grouchy looking guy came into the restaurant. With a scowl, this guy deliberately shoved into line right in front of them. When some people pointed out that the line starts in a different place, he snarled at them, and turned his back. When Frank told me this story, he admitted he was angry. His friends started to say, "Hey buddy, what do you think you're doing!?" Frank admitted that his old self would have gone off on this guy, would have literally picked a fight. In fact,

that's what his non-Christian buddies were telling him to do. Take him out! Hit him! So there's Frank. What does he do in that situation to this rude person? What does a good blessing farmer do in a situation like this? Let me tell you what Frank did. He said, "Hey, you look like you've had a really bad day. Let me buy your food for you. I want to do something nice for you. Let me pay for your lunch." The guy was blown away. He didn't know what to say. He tried to refuse, but Frank insisted and he bought the guy lunch, and the guy ended up opening up to him about some of the stuff he was dealing with. When lunch was over, the guy left in a completely different frame of mind. Frank's buddies were changed too. They exclaimed about what Frank had done. They thought it was weird, they didn't quite understand it, but they thought it was pretty amazing.

That's the kind of farming Paul's talking about. When you bless someone like that, when you freely give them more than they expect and more than they deserve, when you give them grace, you reap a harvest of righteousness. Frank didn't just fill this guy's stomach with food, he filled his heart! And he didn't just fill the guy's heart; he lifted up his friends too! It's exactly what Paul predicts in verses 12 and 13! When you bless generously, the service that you perform is not only supplying the needs of the Lord's people, but it is also overflowing in many expressions of thanks to God...because of what you did, others will praise God for your obedience and generosity.

The reason this works is because grace is God's thing. The reason we can find the strength and joy to bless others like this is that God's blessings overflow to us like this every single day. Every single day our God gives us more blessings than we deserve, more blessings than we have a right to expect. Every single day, out of his immense love, our God gives us more than we could ask or imagine. His grace is all around us. Yes, there are troubles too, but we live in a forest of grace planted by our heavenly Father. The wonderful body you live in with its infinite complexity – a gift of grace planted by the Father. The love of others; do you have people in your family who care about you? If you do, that's a gift of grace planted by the Father. The gift of music, this strange alchemy of sound that opens our hearts and moves our body – that's a gift of grace planted by the Father. The wonder of spring, a world literally bursting into green, rising up out of a grey winter, daffodils springing up on the verges of our city streets, tulips popping in our gardens, that's a gift of grace planted by the Father. The light of the sun slanting through these windows and the story of salvation that our windows

proclaim, that's a gift of Grace planted by the Father. Every day you walk out into a forest a grace, lovingly planted by our Lord.

In the middle of that forest, at it's very center, anchoring the whole forest, there is a tree. It is the tree of life. Not the same one that was planted in the garden of Eden. A new one, planted by Jesus. Did you know that one time when Jesus was talking about saving the world he compared himself to a farmer planting a seed? He said, "*Very truly I tell you, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies it remains a single seed (no abundant harvest), but if it dies it produces many seeds (an abundant harvest).*" He was talking about himself, of course. He is both the farmer and he is the seed. Jesus plants himself. He lets himself be killed. He plants himself in death on the tree of the cross and from that tree new life has sprung. Not just a little bit of new life, enough new life to save me and all of you. Enough blessing to renew the whole creation. We live in a forest of blessing and at the center of that forest is the cross of Jesus, a place from which all blessing flows. So much grace that it's hard for me to put into words. So I will finish where Paul finished: Thanks be to God for His indescribably gift.

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