

Worship Service

BY SHARON KIRKPATRICK FELTON

(As congregants enter the worship space, they receive notecards to be used during the offering.)

Call to Worship: 2 Corinthians 8:1-4

(After the leader reads the scripture passage and says "generosity," predetermined congregants from various locations around the room say aloud, one at a time, the italicized definitions and synonyms.)

We want you to know, brothers and sisters, about the grace of God that has been granted to the churches of Macedonia; for during a severe ordeal of affliction, their abundant joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part. For, as I can testify, they voluntarily gave according to their means, and even beyond their means, begging us earnestly for the privilege of sharing in this ministry to the saints.

Generosity:

*the quality of being kind,
plentiful,
abundant,
lavish,
not selfish,
willing to share,
generous in spirit.*

Come now to worship the God
who is the very definition of generosity,
and who calls each of us to be generous as well.

Invocation

God of all good things,
we invite you to be present today
to receive our worship,
to find our hearts' desires pleasing to you,
and to watch as we live out your example of
abundant love and grace.

Open our hearts
to fresh ways of serving you and your world.
Open our minds
to new ways of sharing all that you have given to us.
Open our souls
so that we may be filled with your overflowing love.
Amen.

Hymn

“Lord, Teach to Us Your Way of Loving”

Lord, teach to us your way of loving,
which is the first lesson of all.
O Christ, who loved the little children,
how sweet and tender is your call!

Lord, help us hear it and then give you
the love you ask of us today.
O Christ, help us love one another,
for this most earnestly we pray.

Lord, teach to us your way of giving,
for this is clearly the next thing:
our love ought always to be showing
what fruit and offerings it can bring.

The Church School Hymnal (1900), alt.
Tune: SPIRITUS VITAE

*Children's Moment*¹

Scripture Reading: 2 Corinthians 8:9-14

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. 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—now finish doing it, so that your eagerness may be matched by completing it according to your means. For if the eagerness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has—not according to what one does not have. 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 your present abundance and their need, so that their abundance may be for your need, in order that there may be a fair balance.

Prayer of Confession

God, within our culture of abundance,
we have more of everything than we really need.
We rent buildings to store our excess.
We believe that we need more and more of everything
in order to be satisfied and happy.
Forgive us for our selfishness,
our gluttony of things,
and our wastefulness.

Forgive us for claiming to be your church in the world,
but failing to share what we have with the world.
You have given us all that we need,
and yet we desire more.
Forgive us for failing to recognize that what we have is yours
and is given to us to share with others.
Instill in us the sense of community that the early church had,
where members shared all that they had
and distributed it to all who had need
so that no one lacked for anything (Acts 4:32-34).

You are the God of generosity.
You gave all of yourself through Christ Jesus
so that we could have life.
Forgive us for not following your example.

Continue to call us to a life of generosity.
Show us daily how we may meet the needs of others
and be good stewards of all that you have given.
Open our hearts and minds and hands
so that we may give to all who have need.

We confess that such generosity is difficult for us
because it runs counter to our culture of abundance.
But it is your heart and your command
that we love you with all that we have.
Transform us
so that we love our neighbors and care for them
even as we love and care for ourselves.
Transform us
so that our first instinct is to share with others
what has been so freely given to us.
Amen.

Hymn

“My Life Is Thine, Lord Jesus” (vv. 1, 3, and 4)

My life is thine, Lord Jesus,
bought with thy blood divine,
and giv’n to thee with gladness,
no longer mine, but thine.
My heart is thine, my Savior,
not part, but all thine own;
oh, it is sweet to know that there
thou hast thy royal throne!

My house is thine, Lord Jesus,
and all that I possess;
use it for whate’er thou wilt,
thou comest but to bless.
The gold that came from thee, Lord,
to thee belongeth still;
oh, may I always faithfully
my stewardship fulfill!

Yea, everything is thine, Lord,
let this my portion be—
that I have nothing of my own,
and yet have all in thee.
And make my life, Lord Jesus,
brightly for thee to shine:
that word and deed, that look and tone,
may witness I am thine.

Jane Woodfall (1902)

Suggested Tunes: ST. THEODUPH or KING’S LYNN

Scripture Reading: 1 Timothy 6:17-19

As for those who in the present age are rich, command them not to be haughty, or to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but rather on God who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. They are to do good, to be rich in good works, generous, and ready to share, thus storing up for themselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of the life that really is life.

*Sermon²**Offering*

During this time of offering, take a few moments to write on the notecard you received when you came into worship. Identify something that you are ready to offer back to God.

Perhaps you have spiritual gifts you have been waiting to use, or possessions of time, talent, or finances you need to share. How has God called you to be generous?

As we sing through the hymn “All Who Thirst” to celebrate God’s abundant generosity, come forward to place your offering on the table. We all have something to give. The question is, are you ready?

Hymn

“All Who Thirst”

All who thirst, come to the waters,
all who have a need or care.
Come and taste the Lord’s great goodness.
Find your soul’s abundance there.

Call to God, who by his favor,
sent his only Son to share
words of life and love transforming.
Find your soul’s abundance there.

Sing to God, oh sing his praises,
ev’ry perfect gift declare.
Sing to God of endless mercies.
Find your soul’s abundance there.

Praise the Lord, who in our silence
heals our hearts through quiet prayer.
Hear his Spirit gently calling.
Find your soul's abundance there.

Anthony Carl (2015)

Tune: ALL WHO THIRST, Anthony Carl and Kurt Kaiser (2015)
(pp. 59-61 of this volume)

Benediction

We come before you, God, as a body of believers who are ready to give back to you what you have so generously given to us. We are ready to give selflessly to our neighbors and our world so that they might come to know you.

God, these are the offerings of our community. (*The worship leader, with discretion, reads a few of the slips of paper placed on the table.*)

Receive these offerings, Lord, and many others like them. Bless them, multiply them, and use them to grow your kingdom here on earth.

Send us out from this place to be people of generosity in a land crying for your hope and compassion. Help us to take your abundance of love and grace and to pour it through our lives into our neighborhoods, our city, our country, and the world. Amen.

NOTES

1 Read the children a story about generosity. Among the popular children's books, I recommend Marcus Pfister, *The Rainbow Fish* (New York: North-South Books, 1992) and Jon J. Muth, *Stone Soup* (New York: Scholastic, 2003).

2 For background on the scripture passages in this worship service, see Kelly D. Liebengood, "Paul's Expectations of Generosity," *Generosity, Christian Reflection: A Series in Faith and Ethics*, 57 (Waco, TX: The Institute for Faith and Learning at Baylor University, 2015), 19-28.



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