

2 Corinthians 9:8 “The Joy of Giving”
Nov. 24th, 2019 – Stewardship Focus Week 3

TEXT: “*And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work.*” 2 Cor. 9:8

Did you notice in our TEXT how many times the word “all” is used? FOUR, plus 1 “every.” Through Jesus’ death and resurrection for us, we HAVE ALL the GRACE we need to be free from sin forever.

We have ALL we need to live in deep JOY ALWAYS!

We even have faith that leads to JOY in ALL the work we do, including giving to others ALL the time.

Still, today, I have to be very frank with you and share some not so good news.

Faith Lutheran Church is being robbed! I mean this in a very serious way. About \$100,000 that should be here is not here. And, now that I hope I have your attention, I need to say that there's a bigger problem. It's not the missing dollars. We're being robbed of something much more important. What's being taken from us is the JOY of doing what God has called us to do! He gives us the privilege to carry out a mission to build his church family here at Faith and to bring others to join us in this Faith family. Right now, however, because of lack of money, we're not able to achieve nearly what we could be doing. We're situated at Faith better than we've ever been with excellent staff and excellent material resources and wonderful members of this congregation who're truly gifted and filled with the joy of Christ. Yet, we're missing the opportunities because the resources to achieve this are not present. Why is this? Why are we about \$100,000 short of what we need to fully achieve our mission plan this year? Why is the Board of Directors struggling...serious, heartfelt struggle...with what to CUT from our budget since we won't spend what we don't have? Who's robbed us?!

WE are the guilty ones...every one of us! NO ONE from outside our walls has come in and stolen from us. The government didn't come and take our money. NO ONE embezzled the funds. What should be here to support our shared mission just hasn't come in! The giving of offerings so far this year is about \$100,000 less than last year at this time. Out of a total budget of about one million dollars, that's a significant deficit.

I can try to offer lots of explanations. There are many excuses. I have my own justifications to offer. But, I need to be honest with myself and with you...

We've been listening to the lies of Satan! We're believing his lie that we can't afford to give up our resources to support God's mission.

We've fallen to the same sin as those addressed by God in Malachi 3:8-10, “*Will man rob God? Yet you are robbing me. But you say, ‘How have we robbed you?’ In your tithes and contributions. ⁹You are cursed with a curse, for you are robbing me, the whole nation of you. ¹⁰Bring the full tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house.” We're just like the nation of Israel in the days of Malachi.*

We're trusting Satan when he tells us it's okay if we're too busy to go to church each week...and if I'm not there, then I don't need to give an offering that week either. LIES! We believe his lies that tell us we don't have any talents we can give that will make a difference...or at least they're not important enough for me to do something that's not very comfortable for me. MORE LIES!

We believe Satan as he says that someone else with more money can pay for the work of the Lord at Faith. STILL ANOTHER LIE!

We also believe the LIE that, *“The church never specifically asked ME for money, so I shouldn’t feel any guilt for not giving.”*

Such lies are Satan's way of defeating us and keeping us from the JOY God wants us to have.

We need to realize that God has promised the resources to achieve the mission he has in front of us. We should never doubt this! Recall our TEXT...

“And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work.”

The key is having the TRUST to put our resources where they need to be to achieve what He has in store for us. Greater JOY comes when we stretch ourselves and put God to the test. As we give freely from our hearts for His work, we see the awesome things he does with our time and talents and treasures. Our joy grows even more when we see that He always provides what we need, even when we give a first portion away. This is the concept behind tithing in Scripture. Listen to the Word of the Lord in Malachi 3:10,

“Bring the full tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. And thereby put me to the test, says the LORD of hosts, if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you a blessing until there is no more need.”

For us in the freedom of Christ, tithing is NOT about having to give a certain amount of money to keep God happy. That’s another of Satan’s lies and it’s far, far from the truth. God loves us unconditionally! He’s already given us Jesus Christ! We already have eternity in heaven with him as a free gift! We have everything we need from Jesus’ hand as we enjoy free forgiveness and love every single day! Now, all he wants to do is give us even more! He wants us to have the joy of being part of HIS joy of giving.

That’s why I’m compelled to remind us all today not to sell ourselves short and give in to the lies of Satan! Don't let the Devil take away this tremendous gift that God wants you to have and for all of us here at Faith to share together.

I’m honestly very excited about the opportunities that are before us right now! We have some wonderful resources.

We have excellent staff members, including, now, Mr. Zander. That’s TRUTH!

We have gifted lay leaders on our boards and committees who are proposing some awesome new endeavors to strengthen and enlarge our Faith family. That’s TRUTH!

We have fantastic facilities that have been improved regularly by the work of committed volunteers. That’s TRUTH!

We have the TRUTH of God’s WORD and SACRAMENTS that are still being proclaimed and delivered to the salvation of souls! We KNOW we are forgiven, free and bound for heaven! NO DOUBT ABOUT IT! That’s the BEST TRUTH OF ALL!

We need to NOT let these awesome resources go to waste!

And, so, I entreat you to put behind Satan's lies and trust in the Lord.

He WILL give you what you need to be able to use your time, your talents and your money in service to Him and for the fulfilling of what He would have us do together. As we stretch ourselves in ways we don't think we can be stretched, He'll have the privilege of showing us it's HIS POWER working through us that will achieve it. Joy grows when we give until we feel challenged...until we're a bit scared about the leap of faith! Your greatest Joy will come when you step beyond what you alone are able to do and let Him show you what He can do when He’s working in you.

When you realize that it was only by the grace of God that you were able to do the things you did for Him, it fills you with an unspeakable joy. That's why I give my tithe AND more. That's what brings me into the pulpit each time I preach. That's why I'm talking to you today about these very important matters. It's ONLY by God's power that I'm speaking to you now. But, by His power, I can't help but tell you what God is eager to do in you and through you as you give up trust in YOUR things and YOUR skills and YOUR time and YOUR money. They're ALL His gifts to share!

As we heard earlier from Malachi 3:10, the Lord says to us, "*put me to the test, ... if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you a blessing until there is no more need.*"

I invite you to join me in this courageous step of doing just that here at Faith!

Let's give what we don't think we can give!

Let's do what we don't think we can do!

Let's boldly encourage one another to fulfill our shared mission of building every relationship in God's way!

Let's courageously invite more into this family!

Let's serve our community with an unusual HOLY love!

Let's stretch ourselves and give the BEST part of ALL our resources to support this work that God would LOVE to bless here at Faith...so our JOY WILL BE FULL!

Don't let Satan cheat us from this joy of giving! Consider the early church believers who fully understood Paul's instruction in 2 Corinthians 9:6, "*whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully.*"

The churches in Macedonia pleaded for the privilege of giving for the good of others. In 2 Corinthians 8:3-4 Paul says, "... *they gave according to their means, as I can testify, and beyond their means, of their own accord, ⁴begging us earnestly for the favor of taking part in the relief of the saints....*"

They had discovered the JOY of the Lord that set them free from our selfish pursuits.

If we remain trapped by the lies of Satan and think we need OUR material resources to be happy or that we only have time to do the things that WE want to do to make us happy, we're losing out on real treasures beyond our imagination!

Join me in praying that God will open our eyes and hearts to see how we're robbing God...robbing Faith Lutheran Church...robbing ourselves of true JOY!

In a world where there's so much hurt and pain and evil, we need this JOY of the Lord to help us endure in hope. Otherwise, life becomes dreary and hopeless and we run right along with the pack on a path towards emptiness, despair, destruction, and hell itself.

So, we return to Jesus' promise to us. He IS all we need! He will give us the knowledge of the Truth so we can see Satan's lies. He will forgive us for our failures to trust him. He will continue to forgive us as we flee to him in penitent faith. He will lead us to the joy of his salvation every day. He will lead us away from robbing God to trusting in Him fully instead. He will fill us with his unspeakable joy! And, remember, "*the joy of the Lord is our strength*." In that joy we will give freely and serve joyfully and accomplish what God has set before us here at Faith Lutheran Church.

Before I conclude this message, I have one more important request...

Please forgive me. For too long I believed the LIE that I shouldn't speak very much about money. In the process I've failed you. I haven't boldly spoken about the JOY that we

could have as we use our money and ALL our resources in God's way. I've let the fear of upsetting a few people keep me from the joy we could all have as we move forward in faith and put God to the test. As a result, we're in danger of having to cut important programs, resources or staff. So, I'm going to seek God's courage to change that moving forward. With God's help, Pastor Scott and I will both seek to keep this Faith family focused on our shared mission of using all of our time, all of our talents, and all of our treasures to the fullest so that we WILL grow in the JOY of the Lord together!

Now, a final illustration to summarize the point of this message...

A man wanders in the desert, nearly dead from thirst. He stumbles across a well with a pump. Near the pump is a jar of water. As he puts the jar of water up to his lips, he sees a piece of parchment with a note written on it. The note reads: *"In this jar there is enough water to keep you alive for a day or two; however, to have all the water you want, you must follow these directions carefully. Pour all the water from the jar into the pump. There is just enough water in the jar to soften the leather gasket in the pump. This softened gasket will allow you to pump all the water you want."* He also notices that there is a P.S. on the bottom of the parchment. *"When you are finished, please fill up this jar for the next traveler."*

The man wandering in the desert questions whether he should believe the note. Does he drink the water from the jar or believe the words on the parchment? God, too, wants us to do something that seems counter-intuitive. In His Word, God encourages us to TRUST HIM and give back a challenging portion of the money we have, or, in light of our story, pour some of it out. Not all of it, as was asked of the thirsty traveler, just part of it. But, enough that it challenges our faith! Even though it seems we don't have enough time or talent or money, God tells us to trust Him and give. He wants us to believe not only in His promise that He WILL provide for our needs, but that through our giving He WILL fill us up to give even MORE. By grace, God even grants us the FAITH we need to trust His promises. He helps us believe that... **we ARE blessed in giving!**

So, join me now in faith!

I'm pouring out my jar of water into the Baptismal font as a symbol of what I'm doing in my heart today...pouring out my own resources, especially my service to God, to faithfully teach you about this JOY of giving!

I'm fully trusting that God will pour it back to our Faith Family in never-ending, overflowing abundance!

Join me, with your time, talents and money; pour out a courageous amount to the Lord! He WILL bless us ALL with even MORE, in ABUNDANCE, and our JOY will be FULL! Amen!