

Abundant Living, Cheerful Giving John 10:10, II Cor. 9:6-8 11/11/18

The Butterball Turkey Company has a telephone hotline to assist customers in preparing their holiday turkeys. A woman called the hotline to inquire about cooking a turkey that had been in the bottom of her freezer for... 23 years! (I'm not making this up!) The Butterball representative told her that the turkey would probably be safe to eat as long as the freezer had always kept it frozen. However, the representative warned her that although the turkey was probably safe to eat, the flavor would have deteriorated to such a degree that she would not recommend eating it.

The caller replied, "That's what I thought. We'll just give our turkey to the church!" Hmmm. I checked the church freezer before worship this morning, just to be sure...you know... There weren't any turkeys in there! Giving to the church! Today is the one day out of the year when I intentionally focus on giving; It's Stewardship Sunday.

Our stewardship theme this year is "Abundant Living, Cheerful Giving." Both parts of that theme are rooted in the teaching of the Bible, and reflect God's genuine intent for his people. We'll begin with words from John 10. In the beginning of the chapter Jesus is comparing his care of the disciples to a shepherd caring for his sheep. Jesus warned that not all shepherds are good, and that there are thieves and predators who would do harm to the sheep. Then he says this, *The thief comes only to steal and*

*kill and destroy. I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.*

(John 10:10)

After reading these words my first question was, “Jesus said that he, the Good Shepherd, came to give abundant life. What does abundant life look like for a sheep?” Well, sheep in Palestine live in terrain that is a dry, rocky, hilly desert- a very inhospitable environment. So sheep are absolutely dependent on the shepherd for their survival. An abundant life for them consists of finding good pasture so they can eat, and being led to water so they won’t die of dehydration. And abundant sheeply living also means being protected from predators and thieves. It is the job of the shepherd to provide them with all of these things.

How about abundant living for people? What is abundant life for us? This is not an easy question to answer. From ancient times philosophers have wrestled with what constitutes a good life. Clearly, like sheep, we need to have our basic requirements met for food and water and shelter. But we need more. We need a sense of security, knowing we are safe. And, we need to feel some sense of purpose, a sense of meaning in our lives, perhaps feeling that we are making a difference, and that we are part of something larger than ourselves. Also, we need a sense of companionship- of connection with other people. Now followers of Jesus can find both purpose and connection in a relationship with him. After all,

the Good Shepherd knows each of his sheep by name. We can also find companionship with fellow followers of Jesus, in churches.

As a side note, I would point out that we haven't talked about money as being necessary for abundant living. Of course a certain amount of money is required, at least enough to provide the essentials- food, water, and shelter. But among people who have those basics, I know people who have very little money, as well as people who have a great deal of it, all of whom would say they have abundant lives. And I've known other people with little and other people with lots of money who don't find that they are living full, abundant lives. The point is that abundant living is not dependent on wealth. As comedian, Jim Carrey, once said, "I think that everybody should get rich and famous... so they can see that it's not the answer." Hold that thought as we move on to the second phrase of our campaign, "Cheerful Giving."

This phrase is based on a passage from Paul's second letter to the church in Corinth. The apostle Paul founded many churches in Greece, including this one. Paul was always concerned about divisions in the church, especially between Jewish believers and Gentile Christians. At the time of this letter, Jewish Christians in Jerusalem were enduring terrible persecution and were living in poverty. As a sign of unity, Paul decided to take up an offering from the Gentile churches in Greece to help their

brothers and sisters in Jerusalem. He devotes two chapters of II Corinthians to that offering! Here's part of what he has to say,

*<sup>6</sup>The point is this: the one who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and the one who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. <sup>7</sup>Each of you must give as you have made up your mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. <sup>8</sup>And God is able to provide you with every blessing in abundance, so that by always having enough of everything, you may share abundantly in every good work. (II Cor. 9:6-8)*

Here, Paul addresses one of the key emotional barriers to generous giving- fear that we won't have enough left for ourselves. He reminds us that the God who has provided us with whatever resources we have is certainly able to provide us with enough to live in abundance if we give abundantly. There's that word again- abundance! It's paradoxical, but our anxiety about money isn't really helped by having more money! There's never enough to cover every contingency. There's never enough to buy us ultimate control over our lives. But our anxiety can be helped by giving, because that act of faith reminds us that we are ultimately dependent on God to provide for our needs; therefore we don't need to live in a state of worry.

And Paul goes further, calling us to cheerful giving! Now some of you may be thinking, "You mean it's not enough to give generously and

sacrificially? I have to be happy about it, too?” Well, yes. I think that’s what Paul is saying here! When we discussed this passage at our small group last week, one of our members said that if we give only out of a sense of duty or compulsion, we’re missing the best part of giving! I like that. And many of us have experienced the joy of giving at some point in our lives.

I think about our mission trip participants. We ask them to give up a week or more of their lives- to live in difficult, often uncomfortable accommodations, work very hard each day, and then to pay for the privilege of doing it! That’s significant giving! But I’ve almost never met anyone after one of these trips that doesn’t find they get more out of their giving than they gave. They would say that their experience of giving their time, talent, and treasure has contributed to an abundant, joyful life, knowing that they made a real difference in the lives of others. You may have had other kinds of experiences where giving is a joyful thing. I hope so.

Presbyterian missionaries in Ghana report something about the worship services in that country that seems odd to us. The happiest part of their worship services is the offering! Really! People come forward with their offerings, dancing down the aisle with beaming faces. They are joyful at being part of God’s work through their giving. I really like that. In fact, if

some of you want to dance down the aisle next Sunday as you bring your pledges forward, please do so! Joyful, cheerful giving.

And your giving to GPC does make a difference in people's lives. It supports pastors who visit the sick, those who are homebound, the dying, the addicted, and those who are grieving. It provides for weekly worship services, and for our music leaders and the tech staff. It provides for Sunday School, small groups, and the Disciple program. It helps pass on the faith to our children and community children through children and youth ministries and choirs. It helps us reach out to our community through funding local missions like Gettysburg CARES, Ruth's Harvest, Habitat for Humanity, the Fruitbelt Farmworker program, Adams Rescue Mission, and the jail ministry. And it supports our mission trips to Honduras, South Carolina, Mexico, Appalachia, and South Dakota. It supports missionaries in Kenya, Japan, Mexico, Ireland, and Thailand. Your giving makes a real difference in the lives of many others in a wide variety of ways.

Let's talk turkey for a minute. While our giving has remained strong during a time of declining attendance, this year's budget is being subsidized by about \$40,000 from a bequest that was recently received by the church. We can't continue doing that indefinitely, so we either need to increase the amount of our giving, or we will have to make cuts in staff or missions. No one wants to do that! So, please prayerfully consider what

you can give to GPC this year, and joyfully come with your pledge next Sunday.

“Abundant Living, Cheerful Giving.” Both are what God desires for us.