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Psalm 65  
2 Corinthians 9:6-15

Abington Presbyterian Church

I'm Gonna Give So God Can ...

A mother wanted to teach her daughter about being generous. She gave the little girl a quarter and a dollar for church. "Put whichever one you want in the collection plate and keep the other for yourself," she told the girl. When they were coming out of church, the mother asked her daughter which amount she had given. "Well," said the little girl, "I was going to give the dollar, but just before the collection the man in the pulpit said that we should all be cheerful givers. I knew I'd be a lot more cheerful if I gave the quarter, so I did."

Oh, how good it is to start off today's sermon with laughter and being cheerful!

We have arrived at Stewardship Sunday. This is the day we talk about giving back to God. This is day we talk about money. It is clear that how much we earn and give may be a personal matter. But it is also a spiritual matter.

If you don't believe it, then try this simple Bible knowledge quiz. I'll share a simple statement, and you decide in your mind if it's true or false. Here's the statement: "The Bible says more about money than it does about prayer." Is that true, or false?

The correct answer is "true." There are 532 verses in the Bible as a whole about praying, and there are 1539 verses about money and giving. There is no doubt that money and giving are deeply spiritual matters.

God – as the Bible teaches us from the very beginning – is the owner and landlord of everything. All we have and own is a gift, a loan, on rent or lease, from God. We are managers, or stewards for God. We are called to productively and joyfully acquire, use, give and share with others the very best of our time, abilities and possessions in the service of God's kingdom. We are managers of God's resources. But we can choose what kind of managers we are going to be.

Let's think about the example of Jesus. "Though he was rich, yet for your sakes . . . he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich," so that we might enjoy all the riches of God's grace: forgiveness and salvation and eternal life! It is in this context that God teaches us about giving, but notice that the biggest thing we learn about it is that our use of money and the way we give is a deeply spiritual matter. Did you catch the language Paul uses to describe it? It comes down to the one word that lies at the core of the Christian faith: "grace."

Biblically, you see, giving is connected to grace. Giving is a sign that you "get it," that you understand grace, and that you truly believe what God has done for us in Jesus. Grace is God's attitude of undeserved favor toward sinners; it also means God's unearned mercy powerfully working within each one of us.

Faithful management of God's resources, then, is part of a relationship created by grace. It is not governed by rules – you must do this and you must give that – but by grace, that is, by our relationship to God in Christ Jesus. How much we earn and how much we give, then, are deeply spiritual matters. We cannot go from paycheck to paycheck without thinking carefully about what we are doing with our money. We cannot use God's gifts without carefully considering the ways in which our actions affect others. This is what doing mission is all about. It's not just about getting a ramp built or giving money. It's about sharing out of our abundance – and we get so much more in return!

Paul ties the simple and commonplace act of opening a wallet or purse, of writing a check, to ultimate spiritual truths. The uncomplicated act of sharing and giving is a reflection of our spiritual maturity. Giving, at its core, is more than helping and serving others. Giving, at its core, is worship, a part of our thanksgiving and praise to God.

A faithful manager of God's resources gives cheerfully. Most of us know what it feels like to give reluctantly, grudgingly or regretfully. We know the amount we need to meet our church budget for this year, and we groan. We may pledge accordingly, but in our hearts we resent the church for expecting so much. Then there are extra offerings and other important causes we are asked to give to.

But that's not the kind of giving God requires of us. God wants us to give gratefully and eagerly, smiling as broadly as Ebenezer Scrooge did on Christmas morning when he found he still had a chance to give and to show love to others. People who understand grace don't view giving as a sort of tax, an unpleasant necessity, or an unmentionable subject. Instead, giving naturally flows out of hearts that have been warmed by God's love.

"God," writes Paul in ch. 9:7, "loves a cheerful giver." Not tearful, but cheerful. Literally, that means "hilarious." God's people are a people who laugh and dance – and give – in gratitude for grace.

So what kind of stewards are we? Are we able to celebrate in not only our accomplishments but also in our giving? How are you finishing the statement, "I'm gonna give so God can ..."

Last Sunday, you heard children, youth and adults share about their experiences over the summer. There were stories of fun times, of growth in relationships, of

learning, or deepening faith. It was a joy to hear from such a wide variety of ages how this church community and its efforts is building and sustaining their faith. And that to me feels like we are being good stewards of our time, our funds and our talents.

But I want to share something more. Many of our college-aged members are continuing to go on mission trips, something they learned at APC. And 4 of our young adult members are currently serving in other parts of the world, giving of their time and growing in their faith. That is part of our giving, part of our worship, reaching out into the world!

Friends, we have been given to so freely. We have been showered with abundance from God. We have been asked to be good stewards and joyfully give back to God. May we be more than cheerful giver – may we be hilarious in our giving as we answer the call from God. Amen.