

6.27.30 L13P5 By HIS Poverty We Became Rich

- We had Temple Talks the last two Sundays about the mission and ministry of the wider church, and how by increasing our giving, we might finally achieve our full annual goal for our Mission Support offering – an offering that we used to call Benevolence
 - Two weeks ago, Don Boyer told us about the important work of the synod assembly, and how through that annual event we partner with our Northeastern PA Synod and the even wider Evangelical Lutheran Church in America to do Christ's work beyond our neighborhood
 - Last week, Tanya Cartwright our Faith and Family Ministry Director reminded us how the wider church develops curriculum for Christian Education, provides funding for Bear Creek Camp and the United Lutheran Seminary, and support for both big Youth Gathering and smaller local youth groups
 - And today, we hear from someone much older than either Tanya or Don – today we hear from no one less than the Apostle Paul
- Yes, Mission Support – Benevolence – has been around for a long time
 - Today we hear Saint Paul's appeal from almost 2000 years ago to support the mission of the wider church with love, prayers, and money
 - You may remember that Saint Paul was not one of the original disciples of Jesus – the Risen Christ had appeared to Paul on the road to Damascus, changing him from an enemy and persecutor of the church, into a Christian and leading missionary of the church
 - Specifically, with his heart changed and faith created by Christ, Paul took the Good News of Jesus Christ crucified and raised for the forgiveness of sin and promise of life – he took this message far and wide primarily to the people of the Roman empire who had *not* been born as believing Jews, but rather who were Romans instead of descendants of Abraham and Sarah
 - So when Paul met with the original disciples of Jesus, they supported his missionary work throughout the Roman Empire, but they asked Paul to do one more thing...

- Largely because the Roman occupation of Jerusalem had become a hardship on the people, the original disciples of Jesus asked Paul in his travels to remember the believers in Jerusalem with love, prayer, *AND an offering to be gathered and sent back to Jerusalem for the poor.*
- This offering for the poor back in Jerusalem is mentioned in at least three of Paul's letters and the book Acts authored by Luke, so it represents *the first known offering of what we would now call Mission Support or Benevolence*
- Now this is more than an historic precedent, this offering for the poor tells us three important things
 - FIRST, the church is ALWAYS more than local. The church includes all the people in the all the communities that God has called into faith in Jesus Christ, and we all have been called to love, pray, and serve and support one another in the common mission of proclaiming the gospel
 - SECOND, the church is more than local, but some parts of the church have more resources than others. So Saint Paul speaking to the church in Corinth in today's reading – and the Corinthian church itself was not very affluent itself – Saint Paul speaking to the church in Corinth said, "...it is a question of a fair balance between your present abundance and their need... [2 Cor. 8:13-14]"
 - And FINALLY, Paul gave an enduring teaching to every generation of Christians from the Corinthians back then to us now – why we are called by God to share with one another in what we now call Mission Support – because JESUS SHARED HIMSELF WITH US!
 - Or as St. Paul says, "... 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... [8:9]"
 - And by becoming rich, Paul does NOT mean that Christ's poverty, his humiliation and death on the cross brings us a gospel of prosperity, like a bigger house, diamonds, or an amazing stock portfolio – no Paul means that through the poverty of Christ on the cross we become rich in grace, forgiveness, and life. In Luther's words, this is a blessed exchange.

- Today, we live at a great distance, and an even greater span of time away from Paul, the church in Corinth, and the poor struggling to survive in Jerusalem
 - But while the details have changed, what Jesus Christ has done for us, the vision of what it means to be the church, and to have the compassion to balance our abundance with the needs of others continues
 - Jesus gave up the royal throne of heaven to take on human flesh and die as a gift to us on the cross
 - The church's authority to declare the forgiveness of sin, welcome people into Christ's family through Holy Baptism, and share the Body and Blood of Christ along with the bread and wine together with the promise that Jesus Christ is absolutely for us – this authority is fully present here in this local community of faith that is called Jerusalem Lutheran Church
 - BUT, we at Jerusalem Lutheran Church are NOT the whole church, and together we are called to remember the saints who have less, the future saints who have yet to hear the promise of Christ, the next generation of youth that they may go to Bear Creek Camp, future people who will someday be welcomed into a new congregation that has not yet been planted, that a medical missionary may soon provide a precious covid-19 vaccine to people in developing countries, that a new generation of church leaders may be prepared and formed into deacons and pastors, and the vision for mission support offerings goes on and on...
 - So thank you for your giving to mission support, formerly called benevolence, and I invite and encourage you to join Mary and me in making either an extra offering to our congregation's mission support goal for this year, or to increase your regular offering for what we used to call benevolence, so that echoing Paul's encouragement, there may be a more fair balance between our abundance and the needs of others.