

October 10, 2010  
Echo Hill Presbyterian Church

2Corinthians 8:1-15

### A Church that is Generous!

**Slide #1** – Intro Slide during Scripture Reading

**Slide #2** – Have you heard?

Have you heard about the churches in Macedonia? Those communities of faith – those people that have given their lives over to Jesus Christ – in places like Philippi and Thessalonica?

Have you heard?

There is something unusual going on – in spite of all the difficulties that they have faced - all the trials and tribulations that have confronted them day in and day out – they possess a deep sense of joy – there is an excitement among them – there is this energy – this passion – pushing them to do more – to be more than one would ever imagine.

Have you heard?

About how poor they are – scrimping and saving just to get by on each day – barely having enough to put on the table – and yet when Paul tells them of the needs of the poor in Jerusalem – how they respond – begging Paul to let them be a part of helping out – and then giving in ways that are incredible – extreme generosity – giving more than anyone would have imagined possible.

Have you heard?

**Slide #3 - Vision**

We have been talking for these last several weeks about our vision and about the pillars – those core beliefs. We have talked about how the vision is a blueprint for building the kind of community that we feel God is calling us to be in Jesus Christ.

We have talked about how these pillars – welcoming, growing, caring and generosity – while not the final product will shape everything we are and everything we do.

We have talked about how our vision is grounded and rooted in the person of Jesus Christ.

- We are called to ‘welcome’ all people because God in Jesus Christ welcomes all people.
- We are called to ‘grow’ because God in Jesus Christ calls us to maturity in faith to bear the fruit that will give life to others.
- We are called to ‘care’ because God in Jesus Christ cares (coming to dwell with us – saving us from ourselves – giving us life that is eternal and is here and now) for each of us.
- We are called to be ‘generous’ because the ‘wealth’ of God’s generosity is demonstrated in Jesus Christ – who leaves behind his divine right – his godly power – taking on our humanity – our powerlessness – giving himself up freely to face a shameful death on a cross – so that we might have life – abundantly – now and forever – God generosity – his love poured out.

These pillars – these core beliefs – these 4 things that are rooted in Jesus and must become rooted in us – will determine what people say about us.

And the important thing -- that we must remember in all this – is that we really don't care about what people say about us – but we do care about our witness to Jesus Christ – and how people perceive us and what they say about us as a community of faith is our witness to how our encounter with the living God – with Jesus – has transformed us. (AMEN)

The question for us today is how do we become that community about who people are saying,

Have you heard about the community of faith that calls itself Echo Hill? Something is going on there. In spite of everything they are facing – the challenges of a new building – of a union – of change. In spite of a down economy – unemployment - the hit their retirement accounts have taken – in spite of their own needs -- there is an excitement – a joy – an energy -- a generosity – that is surprising.

So how do we become this generous community?

Maybe we better start by thinking about what it means to be generous. So why don't you take a minute to write on your Connection Card this morning what it means to be generous.

**Slide #4** – Being Generous – Acting in a way that benefits another.

Most simply being generous is to act in a way that benefits another (person or thing – we might be generous in our care of the earth). Being generous goes beyond a modest act of giving – it represents an abundant kind of giving – a gracious kind of giving – a kind of giving that costs us something but is not a burden – a kind of giving that leaves us feeling right – right in a ‘yeah this is the way it is suppose to be’ right.

Most often when we talk about generosity we think about being generous with **money**.

You heard about Mark Zukerburg the 26 year old founder of Facebook giving 100 million dollars to schools in Newark, NJ. It sounds like a generous thing.

We can also be generous with our **time**. Many of you are. – There are volunteers here this morning greeting, ushering, singing in the Praise Band or Choir, teaching Sunday School, providing coffee and treats. You are good to be generous with your time – volunteering to work Hawkeye Games and Holiday Markets, at Meet and Eat, Neighborhood Meals, and Marion Cares. Giving of our time to take youth on activities and be on call for the nursery, to do the work of many ministry teams.

We can also be generous with our **kindness**, with our **caring**, with our **thoughts**, with our **smiles**, with our **willingness** to engage people – to **be open** to others who are different than us.

We can be generous with our money, our time, our attitude toward others and our talents as well. – This is when we give the **very best of ourselves** – those gifts that God has blessed us with.

This is the carpenters going out to Camp Wyoming to help re-roof the buildings. This is the doctor offering a free clinic. This is artist offering her creative talents to the church. This is one who loves children volunteering in the nursery.

**Slide #5** – Being Generous – Is giving without feeling you have to.

But to be generous goes beyond just acting doesn't it? It is to give without a sense of compulsion, obligation, or duty.

Let me say this about my church experiences in general. From the time I was little – I was taught I needed to give to the church. I would take that nickel every week and place it in the offering basket. The message was always (implicit – often unspoken) 'if you are going to be a part of this community who have do your part financially to support it'. (Yes?)

Often times when we were taught about giving – financially – we were reminded about 'tithing' the principle of giving 10% of the first fruits of what we bring in as a 'thank offering to God'. – And let me say this that tithing as a goal for my giving has helped Donna and I grow in our ability to give – and to be generous in some ways – but if the 'tithe' is the motivation then we are under a command.

You know that for most of us the giving that we do for the church week in and week out – financial giving – the giving time and talent – is often motivated by guilt – by a sense of duty or

obligation – we do our part – we pay our dues – but we never – as a community – get to this place of generous giving.

Think of the difference – when we think about the giving that most of us know on a day in day out kind of way – compared to the ‘wealth of generosity’ that Paul tells us flowed out of the churches in Macedonia – there is no sense of obligation on their part, no sense of duty, they haven’t been coerced (read guilt-ed into), or commanded to do this thing for the Saints in Jerusalem.

So what is it? What is it that is motivating them to give – to give generously – to give beyond their means?

In part I find the answer to my question in a book by J. Clif Christopher called ‘*Not Your Parents’ Offering Plate*’. In this book Christopher talks about why people give – and it has nothing to do with duty or obligation or tithing – and it has everything to do with vision and leadership and fiscal responsibility.

See there are these churches in Macedonia – who have been caught up in this vision of the Kingdom of God – this Kingdom that Jesus came to share – not just in what he said but in what he did. They have been captivated by this vision of community – people whose lives are centered around Jesus Christ – who are being freed to change – to be different by God’s forgiving grace – people who are called to care about one another in real tangible ways – people who are called to welcome the outsider – the one who is marginalized – the one who is the

outcast from society – they are called to grow – in Christ – to grow and bear fruit – the fruit of right living – of loving God and loving one another.

This vision is changing lives in meaningful ways. People are being freed from old definitions of who they are and what they should do – freed to live in the goodness of God’s created purpose.

This is what compels the churches in Macedonia to be generous. They gave themselves first to Jesus – they gave themselves to the vision – of being these people – this community – transformed by their encounter with Jesus – empowered by the Holy Spirit.

And this is what compels us to be generous.

If we are going to be a generous community – it will not be because Pastor Bill said we should. It will not be because we have it put in a document that says we should. It won’t be because the finance folks produce some slick piece of literature that will compel us to.

No, it will be because we have been captivated by Jesus’ vision of the Kingdom. It will be because we believe that we have been called to be generous people because God in Christ is amazingly generous to us. It will be because we believe that our generosity will change lives – that it will make a difference – in our community – in our nation – in our world.

**Slide #6** – Becoming generous – Small steps

Becoming generous isn't an overnight transformation – it is way of life that must be practiced daily. To grow in our ability to be generous we must take small steps at first – walking before we can run.

Maybe you would like to be more generous with the gift of your time here at church – maybe you currently aren't involved in anything – so possibly you would start by taking the time to make cookies or a special treat for our fellowship – or maybe by volunteering to run the dishwasher after a fellowship meal.

Maybe you are doing those things – so maybe it is time to grow in generosity – giving your time in the Sunday morning program – or helping prepare a meal on Wednesday night – or serving on one of the ministry teams – or volunteering to help with one of the Hands on Mission opportunities.

Don't do these things because I am saying you should – do them if you believe they are making a difference in peoples' lives.

Perhaps – you grow in how you are generous with your money. Maybe you are not giving regularly – start now by committing \$5- 10 every week even if it is a stretch for you. Maybe you are giving regularly and now it is time to move that giving up a notch or two. I know your income has been fixed – no pay raise in the last few years – the cost of everything keeps going up. It will cost you something – you will have to give something up – that is what generosity is about – giving something up for the sake of another.

Maybe where you need to start is by being generous in your attitude toward others. – Maybe a sign goes up on the refrigerator reminding you not to be judgmental – to remember the other who you will encounter today is a child of God. Maybe you want to be generous in your kindness – in your thoughts and words – generous in your encouragement of others.

Slide 7 – Have you heard?

Have you heard about the community of faith that calls itself Echo Hill? Something is going on there. In spite of everything they are facing – the challenges of a new building – of a union – of change. In spite of a down economy – unemployment - the hit their retirement accounts have taken – in spite of their own needs -- there is an excitement – a joy – an energy -- a generosity – that is surprising.

May this be what people are saying about us. Amen.