

May 19, 2019
Sixth Sunday of Easter

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WHY DON'T WE!?...

II Corinthians 8:1-5

II Corinthians 9:6-9

We want you to know, brothers and sisters, about the grace of God that has been granted to the churches of Macedonia; for during a severe ordeal of affliction, their abundant joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part. For, as I can testify, they voluntarily gave according to their means, and even beyond their means, begging us earnestly for the privilege of sharing in this ministry to the saints— and this, not merely as we expected; they gave themselves first to the Lord and, by the will of God, to us,

9:6-11

The point is this: the one who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and the one who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. Each of you must give as you have made up your mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. 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. As it is written, 'He scatters abroad, he gives to the poor; his righteousness endures for ever.'

He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness. You will be enriched in every way for your great generosity, which will produce thanksgiving to God through us;

Prayer for illumination

Let our hearts come alive with your love, O God, as in our worship your Spirit brings your word through scriptures, prayer, sacrament and song and through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

WHY DON'T WE!?!...

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INTRODUCTION

The Harvard theologian and mystic Howard Thurman tells a whimsical story that tickles me every time I think of it. The story is about a man who dreamed of journeying to a large city. When he arrived early in the morning it was cold. Snow flurries were flying and a shroud of white covered the sidewalks and streets. As he stepped from the train he noticed that the baggage-man and the red cap were warmly dressed -- but they wore no shoes! He thought this was odd -- on such a cold day, but he said nothing. His curiosity was heightened when he noticed that no one in the station wore shoes.

Boarding the bus, he saw that all his fellow-travelers were barefoot and when he arrived at the hotel, everyone there was unshod.

He couldn't restrain himself any longer so he asked the manager about the practice. The manager said, "What practice?" and so the visitor said, "Why don't any of you wear shoes in this town?"

And the manager replied, "Ah, that's just it. Why don't we?" But the visitor was persistent. "But what is the matter? Don't you believe in shoes?"

And the man replied, "Believe in shoes, my friend! I should say we do. That is the first article of our creed, shoes. They are indispensable to the well-being of humanity. Why shoes make things more comfortable. Not to speak of the cuts, sores, suffering they prevent. They are wonderful!"

Well, then, why don't you wear them?" the visitor asked. And the manager said, "Ah, that's just it. Why don't we?"

The visitor checked into his room, and went to the coffee shop and sat down next to a gentleman who wore no shoes. He was very friendly. And after the meal he invited the visitor on a tour of the city. The first stop was a huge brick structure of impressive size. The host pointed to this building with great pride. "That is one of the outstanding shoe manufacturing establishments."

The visitor said, "You mean you make shoes there?"

The host replied, "Well, not exactly, we talk about making shoes there and believe me, we have one of the most brilliant young fellows you have ever heard. He talks most thrillingly and convincingly every week on the great subject of shoes. He has a most persuasive and appealing way. Just yesterday he moved the people so profoundly with his exposition of wearing shoes that many broke down and wept. It was wonderful!" The visitor asked again: "But why don't you wear them?" And the host, putting his hand on the man's arm said, "Ah, that's just it. Why don't we?"

They then turned down a side street where a cobbler actually was making a pair of shoes. The visitor excused himself from the host, burst into the shop and asked the shoemaker why he was not overrun with customers. And the cobbler said, "Nobody wants my shoes. They

just want to talk about them." The visitor bought what pairs of shoes the man had completed and rushed from the shop. He handed a pair to his host and said, "Take them. Put them on -- you'll feel so much better on this cold day with shoes."

But the man was embarrassed. He politely thanked the stranger but shook his head. "You don't understand. It just isn't done. The best people in this town would never." The visitor could not believe his ears. "But why don't you wear them?" And the man smiled beneficently and said, "Ah, that's just it. Why don't we?" Soon the visitor left the city -- but one question kept ringing over and over in his ears, "Why don't we?" "Why don't we?" "Why don't we?" (Howard Thurman, *The Growing Edge*, p. 146).

This delightful and stimulating story deals with the age-old questions of why don't we do some things we should be doing. It speaks of the matter of giving lip service to something and not doing anything about it. It points to the problem of not reaching our full potential when we have the resources at our finger tips to do so.

Why don't we...? is not a whining lament - but a positive query.

A CORINTHIAN RESPONSE

The apostle Paul must have had similar feelings when he dealt with the church at Corinth. In a thriving metropolis teeming with people from all over the known world, there were bands of people totally new to the faith.

Through his letter Paul raised an important consideration for the Corinthians. His object was not merely to get money from people but to induce them to give from the right motive. They had little history or experience in giving. So Paul opened the door. Perhaps he said ... "Why don't we... give to the church, systematically and regularly?" in a positive way.

Paul lifted up the churches at Macedonia as an example. These congregations had been severely tested and pressed financially. But interestingly, the severe hardships they had experienced did not dry up the contributions to the church. In fact, it was the source of inspiration to give even more.

We don't know amounts; for Paul the amount was not relevant. Of importance was the fact that they engaged in something beyond themselves. Even in their scarcity, they found abundance. From it, they joyfully shared. Their example has been an inspiration, not only to the Corinthian church, but to Christians for 2,000 years.

The Macedonians learned somewhere their giving didn't depend on what someone else gave; it didn't depend on what their "fair share" might be; but having first given themselves to the Lord. They saw giving as a privilege, not an obligation. They found fulfillment and joy in generosity. It was an honor to be part of God's work on earth. For them giving was an essential part of faith just as putting on shoes is essential to getting dressed.

LIP SERVICE

What intrigued Paul about the church in Macedonia was that they didn't just give lip service to the idea of responding to God through generous gifts, they put their words into actions.

In the story I opened with, the people had the resources to make shoes but chose only to talk about making shoes. They even had an eloquent spokesman who could give tear jerking expositions on the matter. But that was as far as it went... just talk.

It reminds me of a story about Homer and Emmylou courting on the front porch swing on a fair summer eve. Now Homer was very much in love with his beautiful and beloved Emmylou. However, the lad could not muster up the courage to physically express that love. But he could certainly talk about it.

"Emmylou", he said, "if I had a thousand eyes, they would all be looking at you. Emmylou, if I had a thousand arms they would all be embracing you. Emmylou, if I had a thousand lips all would be kissing you!"

Emmylou looked at Homer and said, "Homer, hush! Stop complaining about what you don't have, use what you do. Stop talking and start acting for heaven's sake!"

The cross that sets before us is not a symbol of talk. It is a symbol of action, of God's supreme gift of love to us.

ACTION

The gospel of Jesus Christ empowers us to understand all that we are and have is a gift from God. exciting things happen because good people like you pause and say..."Why don't we?" Then do something about it.

"Don't ask what the world needs. Ask what makes you come alive, and go do it. Because what the world needs is people who have come alive."

When it comes to the lingering "why don't we" interrogative – another question to ask is: what is it that moves you and makes you come alive? Is it receiving? Or, is it giving?

Prayer

O Living Christ, from whose fullness we have received grace upon grace. Our hearts cannot withhold our devotion, or our hands grasp for ourselves what you summon us to give. Move us in ways that make us come alive – with eyes to see You, insight to choose You, steadfastness to follow You.

Amen.