

St. Mark Lutheran Church (ELCA)  
Ada, Ohio 45810, Year C

Pastor David Coffin, D.Min  
Sermon

1 Corinthians 16:2; Romans 12:1-2; 2 Timothy 3:14

### **Celebrate Generosity – 4**

*On the first day of the week, each of you is to set something aside and store it up, as you may prosper, so that contributions not be made when I come 1 Corinthians 16:2*

*But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it 2 Timothy 3:14*

*I appeal to you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may prove what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect Romans 12:1-2.*

#### **Introduction:**

Once there was an experiment conducted with children going to summer camp. Kids from a few different school districts were reorganized into cabins or groups. Each cabin was to become a team and compete against other cabins for who is first in the food line; that gets to use the water sports equipment first and who has to do Kitchen Patrol [KP]. As the week went on each cabin was a strong team and saw themselves as “fierce competitors” of the other cabin groups of campers.

*Competition grew so fierce between cabins of campers that each was out to undermine the other and hostility based on cabin competition emerged. So former schoolmates from the same school often acted like “adversaries,” if they were in different cabins.*

Name-calling, sabotage of other cabins and dissension grew out of this competitive spirit. So the Camp director had the entire group of campers

go out on a field trip aboard a large truck. The Camp director purposefully made sure there was not enough gasoline to get back to the campgrounds.

Sure enough, the truck full of campers stalled out about a good ½ hour away from the campgrounds. The campers were all hungry. They were told that there is fresh, hot food waiting for them at the campgrounds. But now they must all work together to get themselves and truck back to the campgrounds.

Now the competing groups had to re-form into a larger group and use all of their pooled talents and abilities to achieve a common destiny—to get back to the campgrounds so each can have the fresh, hot food that awaits them.

Today's sermon is both from Eugene Grimm's work of "*Celebrate Generosity*," and book I have been reading by Philip Esler entitled, "*Conflict and identity in Romans: the social setting of Paul's letter.*"

**In the book of *Romans*, Paul is in a difficult situation that many leaders might find themselves in today.**

- A. Paul is being asked to deal with in-house conflict and tension among the Christians in Rome.
- B. Paul did not develop nor even visit the church in Rome. In the letters to the *Galatians* and *Corinthians*, Paul is the missionary who first gave the message of Jesus' death on the cross and resurrection from the grave.
- C. Therefore, Paul could speak with certain "authority" based on, "This is the message I first brought you—here is where you are going off course and here is where you are doing a good job."

*In Rome, Paul has no such authority. Paul is like the new supervisor or leader who has just moved to the organization from out of town. The former supervisor not only knew all the people, but was a "Native" of the community. A new supervisor*

*from out of town has two strikes against him or her:*

- *They are not from around here.*
- *They do know many of these people. They have heard their names and that is it.*

**Some problems Paul must deal with include:**

- . Former Judean [Jewish] worshippers who are now Christians are use to worshipping in the larger Temples that were more spacious and had huge financial donors. The Christians worshipped behind a business or in somebody's cramped living room. After the novelty of "close worship" wears off, people start to get on each other's nerves.
- 0. Even amongst the house churches, there were some made up of former Gentiles or Pagan Greek god worshippers. And there were some house churches made up of former Judeans [or Jews]. The Judeans are the "traditionalists." The Gentile Christians are newcomers who have strange habits unfamiliar to those who were raised in the Temple.
- 0. Also, there were the more economically successful Christians—whose home churches had more space and more comfortable seating. Then there were the struggling craftsmen whose house churches were in the cramped quarters behind their merchant shop, sandal shop or barn for animals.
- 0. Some ethnic backgrounds were seen as "crude and barbaric," such as Roman soldiers. Others were seen as "flighty and too artsy-craftsy," such as Greek artists. Still others were seen as "stick in the mud" who won't take any risks—such as traditionalists from the Jewish Temple.

**Paul has to persuade these people to come together as the Director of the summer camp did with the students from rival cabins.**

*Let us get back to the new supervisor who has come into another community. The supervisor decided the best strategy is to appeal to what all members of the organization hold in common! First, the work group all want to succeed and be profitable. Second, all want a good working atmosphere. Third, all want a means in which each person is treated fairly in terms of work performance and in the event of conflict. Whoever is supervisor must be able to deal with these top three issues.*

Paul did the same thing with the Romans. He appeals to what all Christians might want—*regardless of their ethnic, socio-economic or religious background.*

0. *In Romans 1:17* he reminds them that the “Just shall live by faith alone” [In God]. This would be true regardless of what god or from which background any single Roman Christian came from.
0. *In Romans 7*, Paul shows how he struggles with not doing the right thing in God’s eyes, though he knows better. In *Romans 8*, he is thankful that God is merciful and forgives him in Christ’s death. This could apply to all Christians.
0. *Later in Romans 8*, Paul provides assurance that “Nothing will separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus” (Romans 8:31).
0. *Now in Romans 12* [Our stewardship text], he is telling the diverse group of Romans to give their bodies and minds as a living sacrifice to God. Gentiles recognize human sacrifice. Judeans or Jewish Christians recognize the Old Testament “Wisdom and Law” traditions. So both groups could identify with this type of sacrifice.

*In the Mel Gibson movie, “Braveheart” young William Wallace has seen that his Scottish father was brutally executed by the English King who created a so-called peace conference—for the*

*sake of slaughtering the Clan chiefs. After the funeral, William Wallace's uncle is to raise him. Young William wants to know how to use the sword to avenge his father and Scotland. But his uncle told him that he must first learn to use his head before he can use a sword or fight for anybody.*

**St. Paul is using a similar leadership skill.**

**Today on “Celebrate Generosity” Sunday**, we are asking all people at St. Mark Lutheran Church—regardless of their background, socio-economic situation or views of what is “traditional or progressive,” to do what we know as we have been taught, as St. Paul has said to Timothy.

- . The community of faith or the church *needs our offerings every week.*
- 0. *We need to plan to give* to the church—just as we plan for meals and for the welfare of our families.
- 0. Our *congregation's ministry is broad enough that we can support any number of ministries* that touch us from: Christian education, Church life outreach, Building concerns, and of course missions.
- 0. What we have in common with the Roman Christians is that we are one of the smaller churches in our area.
- 0. But we do know what is needed for our congregation to function in a healthy manner.
- 0. In these past few weeks, we have indicated that giving is:
  - A. How we worship God on a regular basis.
  - B. It is how we grow spiritually.
  - C. It helps the church do its ministry in areas that no one could person could do on their own.

D. It sets the example and precedent for future generations.

***The local church is what we make it in terms of our giving. God is on our side. Christ died for the church. Part of our way of saying “Thank you” to God as Disciples is our regular commitment to giving.***

***How does one become transformed “spiritually” according to Paul in Romans? This is accomplished by consistent giving of money, time and talents. Paul even goes as far to say that it is a “sacrifice.”***

God has given us much. Stewardship theology is essentially us saying “Thank you” for the eternal life and “assurance that nothing can separate us from the love of God.”

### **To conclude:**

Once there was a church in Florida that was left open at night. Some boys went into the sanctuary and started to play around on the pulpit. One boy was making fun of the announcements for stewardship and giving. The pastor heard some noise in the sanctuary.

Seeing the boys playing around on the pulpit, the pastor quietly got a hold of the microphone and tuned on the speaker and bellowed out in a loud low voice, “I AM THE LORD YOUR GOD... YOU SHALL HAVE NO OTHER GODS... YOU SHALL WORSHIP ME WITH ALL THAT YOU HAVE!”

All the boys were scared to death! They all ran out of the sanctuary as fast as they could. All of these same boys grew up to become pastors, missionaries and Sunday school teachers. As a postscript, what does it take to put the fear of God in us? **Amen.**

Works cited:

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