

November 15, 2015

Supporting the Mission (2 Cor. 8:1-15)

Sermon Series: Hope's Mission

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I have a friend named Richard who is a professional fundraiser. He works for a Christian mission organization, and he makes his living asking people for money. I asked Richard recently, "Do you ever get tired of asking people for money?" He smiled, and said, "I never get tired of it. Because all I'm really doing is giving Christian people an opportunity to receive even more of God's grace by sharing their blessings. So I love my job!" exclaimed Richard.

I think St. Paul loved his job, too. Back in the late first-century AD, Paul was a missionary, not a fundraiser; but, in the Bible, we do read about Paul asking people for money. Paul was taking up a collection among the churches he had planted. The Christians back in Jerusalem and Judea were suffering from a terrible famine. They were hungry, starving, and in dire need.

So Paul asks the churches for money. He doesn't lay down the law. He doesn't demand a certain amount of money. He simply points out a serious need in the church, and he gives the people an opportunity to respond freely and joyfully. And they did!

See, brother Paul had the exact same view that my friend Richard does. St. Paul believed that every opportunity we have to do a good deed – every chance we have to contribute to a good cause – is a God-given opportunity.

And that's what I want to talk with you about today – opportunities. If you think of your life as a basket, is God trying to fill your basket with more and more "stuff"? Or is

God trying to fill your basket with more and more opportunities?

Most of us, deep down, have a goal in life to accumulate as much stuff in our basket as we can -- money, security, health, happiness, friends, donuts. And once in a while, if we're really sharp, we stop and acknowledge that all of that "stuff" comes from God. He's the provider. But we still tend to think of the basket as "our stuff," don't we?

God sees your basket in a completely different way. Do you know what God really wants to fill your basket with? Opportunities. God wants you to have more and more opportunities to share your "stuff," to help others out, to spread the love of Jesus, to be generous with those who are lacking, to support the mission of Christ, to use your time, talents, and treasures to do good and to glorify God.

Those opportunities are the real gifts God wants to put in your basket today! Every good work on our part is the only the fruit of God's grace operating in us. Those who refuse to give are only turning their basket away when God is trying to place another gift in it. When we hang on tightly to what we have, we lose the opportunity to be blessed, to be enriched, to be given even more by God.

So St. Paul, like my friend Richard, was happy to ask the Christians in Corinth, in Macedonia, and in Rome for money. Because all he was really doing was giving God's people an opportunity to receive even more of God's grace by sharing their blessings. "Here's a need in the church," he said. "Famine relief. Will you cheerfully give to others, out of love for God who poured out all his riches on you by sending Jesus to be your Savior?" Paul's appeal was a God-given opportunity placed in their basket.

Allow me to put an opportunity before you today. Our church here at Hope has a need, too. It's not so dramatic as a severe regional famine. We're all pretty well-fed here, it appears. But right now, here at Hope, we have a need.

We're drawing near to the end of the year, and we've fallen behind in our giving. It's nothing to panic about. We're not going to have to turn off the lights, or only give you a half a wafer at communion. But, throughout the year, we've been reporting a slight offering shortfall each month, and that shortfall is building up. So, even though a lot of really good things are going on in our church these days, when it comes to our overall giving for the year, we're running about \$75,000 behind right now.

But the church's real need right now? It's not dollars and cents. It's not about budgets and debt reduction. The real need here at Hope right now has to do with our mission. God has given this church a mission. To bring Christ to our community. To bring our community to Christ. Pastor Wagner reminded us last week that's why this church was started back in 1996, and Hope's mission in 2015 is still the same.

A \$75,000 offering shortfall is definitely a problem. But it's also an opportunity. It's a God-given opportunity for you and me and all the people of Hope to support the mission here in our church.

Let's take a quick look at that flyer tucked into the bulletin. Turn to the inside page, on the right side, in that blue box toward the bottom. Please read the rest later on your own. But this section on page 3 is important for all of us to see. Here's the mission opportunity that God is putting into your basket today.

The people of Hope Lutheran Church have an exciting mission opportunity right now. Three important "**growth initiatives**" were included in our 2015 budget planning. We haven't spent a penny yet in 2015 in these areas, though, due to concerns with giving.

- **Outreach (\$10,000):** targeted mailings to Wake Forest newcomers; part-time staffing for expanded visitor follow-up.
- **Worship (\$10,000):** preliminary staffing and resources to develop a fourth weekly worship service at Hope.
- **Cash Reserves (\$16,000):** ensure that 2015 budget year ends up in the black, to further stabilize Hope's finances after two full years of making monthly interest and principal mortgage payments (debt reduction).

People of Hope, these are three things we'd still like to get at, because our church needs to grow. Hope needs to move forward. God wants us to reach more people for Christ in our community, and these three growth initiatives will make an important start. So we're making a year-end appeal. Take this home, and read it through. It will take you four or five minutes; but it's important. Our goal is to take a bite out of that \$75,000 shortfall – not for the sake of the budget, but for the sake of the mission. Supporting the mission of this wonderful church is the opportunity God is putting in your basket right now.

If you're doing all you can, all we ask you to do is to just pray for God to bless our church. If you're behind on your pledge for the year, just do your best to catch up, if you can. If you've been blessed this year, and are able to make an extra free-will, cheerful gift during the next month, it's much appreciated.

Most of all, celebrate the gift God's putting in your basket today: an opportunity to help kids and youth and adults to grow in faith; an opportunity to spread the name of Jesus in our community. May God keep filling up your basket with

opportunities! Amen.