

Thanksgiving Day, Epistle, Year A

EUCCHARISTIC LIVING

2 Corinthians 9:6-15

Thanksgiving Day

Analysis by Bruce K. Modahl

6The point is this: the one who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and the one who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. 7Each of you must give as you have made up your mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. 8And 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. 9As it is written,

“He scatters abroad, he gives to the poor;
his righteousness endures forever.”

10He 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. 11You will be enriched in every way for your great generosity, which will produce thanksgiving to God through us; 12for the rendering of this ministry not only supplies the needs of the saints but also overflows with many thanksgivings to God. 13Through the testing of this ministry you glorify God by your obedience to the confession of the gospel of Christ and by the generosity of your sharing with them and with all others, 14while they long for you and pray for you because of the surpassing grace of God that he has given you. 15Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!

DIAGNOSIS: A Capital Problem

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem): Capital

Allocations

In an on-the-street Thanksgiving Day interview one young man said, "Eating and shopping, that's what it's all about, man." No, that is not what it is all about. The context for this day's text and the preaching of it is the gathering of family and friends, and the reenactment of our nation's founding feast. Before this Thanksgiving, however, we gather at an earlier hour for The Great Thanksgiving meal, foundational to our faith. It is at this Thanksgiving we hear read 2 Corinthians 9:6-15 and step up to preach.

Paul's capital campaign for the church in Jerusalem is not going well, at least not in Corinth. From the language he uses it seems the gifts are sparse and what is given is given reluctantly. I can almost hear the objections, "Why are we giving money to help these foreigners in a distant land when so many of our own are in need?" As people consider where to allocate their capital they question the reasons for this investment.

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem): Misplaced Capital
Their hearts are not in it. Where are their hearts? There is a danger of reading our own issues into the text. However, people today are no different from people then. Paul writes of God's ability to "provide you with every blessing in abundance, so... you may share abundantly in every good work" (v. 8). Perhaps the people of First Church Corinth are as afraid of not having enough capital as are we today. If that is the case they misplace the capital that is their faith. They invest in fear.

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem): Wrong Capital
Of course, the people may have legitimate concerns about the wisdom of Paul's capital campaign. However, their objections should lead to some introspection about their reasons. If they are failing to trust God's promise to provide they are investing

in and making a god out of what is not God. They have a different kind of “capitol” problem. Here I am suggesting a word play with capitol—as in the ancient temple of Jupiter at Rome, on the Capitoline, or capitol as the site of a governing body. The people have invested in a governing body other than God.

PROGNOSIS: Eucharistic Living

Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution): God’s Capital Campaign

God so loved the world he gave his only Son. God sowed bountifully with the life of Jesus. In Jesus’ grave God buried the power that sin, death, and devil have over us. God reaped bountifully for us. He reaped forgiveness, freedom from the fears that constrict life, and with Jesus’ resurrection he reaped eternal life for all who live in Jesus. Paul says this is God’s indescribable gift (v. 15).

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution): Investing in God’s Promise

“Investing” is another way of saying believing in God’s promise of abundance. Surveying the reading, Paul does not promise we will receive seven or ten or any dollars for each dollar we give. Paul rather speaks of bounty, abundance, overflowing thanksgivings, cheer, enriched generosity, and surpassing grace. In the offertory we bring our gifts of money. God blesses these gifts and multiplies them back to us for ministry in our place and around the world. We bring our offerings of bread and wine. God blesses these and regifts them to us as the very means by which he has redeemed us, the body and blood of Christ. We bring our offerings of prayer and praise. God receives them gladly, blesses them, multiplies them and returns them to us for lives that are Eucharistic.

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution): God So Loved the

World

God so loved the world that God gave the church. Yes, I know the church is marred with sin. People cite crusades, inquisitions, and clergy sexual abuse to discredit us. We all know the joke of the 19th-century theologian Alfred Loisy: "Jesus promised us the kingdom. What we got was the church." But the church is the body of Christ. In fits and starts we do what Jesus did. We point to the kingdom. The gospel frees us to live according to its ethos. We live out of the abundance of the new creation. Following the ethos of the kingdom Paul sketches out for us its capital allocation plan. As with this-worldly plans, we live on our investments. From the Lord's Supper table we have an abundance of blessings, spiritual and material. Paul called for the people of the church in Corinth to provide for the needs of the poor in Jerusalem. By doing so they were obedient to their confession of the gospel of Christ. Paul says that by doing so they glorify God. My teacher Bob Bertram often offered the definition to "make look good" for the word "glorify." Paul says to the people of First Church Corinth, "You make God look good by your obedience to the confession of the gospel of Christ."