

Third Sunday after Pentecost – Epistle

CHRIST'S POVERTY MAKES US RICH

2 Corinthians 8:7-15

Third Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 8)

Analysis by Timothy J. Hoyer

7 Now as you excel in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in utmost eagerness, and in our love for you—so we want you to excel also in this generous undertaking. 8 I do not say this as a command, but I am testing the genuineness of your love against the earnestness of others. 9 For you know the generous act of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich. 10 And in this matter I am giving my advice: it is appropriate for you who began last year not only to do something but even to desire to do something— 11 now finish doing it, so that your eagerness may be matched by completing it according to your means. 12 For if the eagerness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has—not according to what one does not have. 13 I do not mean that there should be relief for others and pressure on you, but it is a question of a fair balance between 14 your present abundance and their need, so that their abundance may be for your need, in order that there may be a fair balance. 15 As it is written, “The one who had much did not have too much, and the one who had little did not have too little.”

DIAGNOSIS: A Fair Balance

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem) – *Love or Earnestness*

Our lives in Christ begin with God giving us Christ, so that we may be able to give Christ to those who are in any affliction with the Christ whom we ourselves have been given by God (2 Corinthians 1:4). God consoles us in all our afflictions so that we may be able to console others with the consolation we first got from God. Jesus makes us wealthy by giving us his love so that we may love one another (v. 9). Yet our inward-curved hearts take this gift and construe that gift as something we deserve. We become “earnest” (v. 8) or anxious, or we fear the future and all its “what ifs.” How can we be generous if the future may have an economic downturn or a drought or a loss of consumer confidence? How can we continue to volunteer at the hospital or church if our kids get involved in sports? Instead of acting out of the richness of love, we compete out of earnestness. Some will even compete at being more Christian than others.

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem) – *Tipping the Scales in Our Favor*

Our earnestness about not being poor in the future increases our self-concern. To make the future more secure we add to the side of the scale that guarantees us a better future. We save for a rainy day. We save six months pay in case we lose our job. We save for the kids’ college education. We rearrange our investments for our retirement. We listen to financial advisers. Congregations cut back on programs, on their gifts to their synod, and switch their world hunger money to current expenses (see vv. 10-11). We think we are doing the best we can to be responsible. We think we are practicing our best stewardship of limited resources. We, in our earnestness, have put our trust in our own arrangements for our future. We have failed to trust in

a God who gives so that we can give. We have failed to trust in a God who consoles so that we can console others with God's consolation. We offer condolences instead of consoling others with the gift of Christ's resurrection. Our genuine love for God and others has been reduced to love for ourselves.

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) – *Weighed and Found Wanting*

Though we thought we were simply acting to our advantage, God's law is still imposed on us like an annual review. We can tell ourselves we are following God's will, but meanwhile we have completely disregarded God's will that we have faith only in God. God's will is not something we can follow in order to become rich in God's favor and grace. God wills to show us that we are accountable to God for all we do. God wills to make us guilty. No one can escape this final judgment. Our poverty is that our cupboard of faith is bare, and our pantry of love for others is empty. Death, by God's judgment, comes to everyone.

PROGNOSIS: The Generous Act of Our Lord Jesus

Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution) – *His Death Is Our Righteousness Before God*

Jesus comes to everyone with a new judgment from God. Jesus, instead of making demands of and requiring that we pay God what we owe, does an act of gargantuan generosity. He became poor on the cross for our sake. He was poor, for he forfeited his life. He was poor, for he received only God's condemnation. He was poor, for he received no mercy because the law of God has no mercy and allows no excuse. Then God, by grace, raised Christ from the dead! And for Christ's sake God promises us that all who trust Christ receive the riches of forgiveness, righteousness, and eternal life. Christ gives us his cross so that it is our own. We are made wealthy with the cross of Christ. Wealthy because the cross of Christ gives us Christ's

mercy, Christ's forgiveness, and Christ's resurrected life. By Christ's poverty on the cross we become rich in God's mercy! Death is overturned. God's condemnation is overturned, all for Christ's sake.

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution) – *His Poverty Is Our Richness*

The poverty of Christ's cross becomes the riches that redeem us. For by faith God regards what Christ has done as something we have done. We have died with Christ. Therefore we will be raised with Christ. Our wealth is the resurrection. We have died with Christ. Therefore we become righteous before God for Christ's sake, when we believe that Christ died and rose for us and that for his sake we are forgiven and become righteous before God. For God regards that faith as our riches, because our faith is in Christ. God no longer regards us as poor, miserable sinners, but as rich, thankful saints.

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) – *Genuineness of Our Love*

We have the riches of Christ-mercy, forgiveness, and righteousness before God. We are rich! With our new hearts of faith, such hearts are not curved in on themselves, but act with the love Christ gives us. We act with the mercy Christ gives us. Just as God consoles us so that we can console others, Jesus gives us his love so that we can give his love to others. Jesus gives us his forgiveness so we can give his forgiveness to others. Our riches in Christ are for others for Christ's sake. We do not give because others deserve it or earn it. We get to be generous! The gift we give is acceptable because of what we have. Our abundance of mercy frees us to be merciful to those who are in need of mercy, so that when we are in need of mercy, they can be generous with the mercy of Christ too. Trusting that Christ's mercy is for us, that heaven is our future, we can give when we have money and others are in need. We can give with what

we have so that when we are in need others can give out of what they have. This giving starts, not with what we own, but with Christ making us rich. Our riches are faith in God's goodness. Our riches are trust in God because of Christ's death and rising. It is the richness we have in Christ that frees us to act richly in feeding our neighbors. We can give because Christ makes us rich, not our money or time. We can give without asking for anything in return. For Christ will keep giving us mercy and we can draw upon him whose generosity knows no end.