

## *“Sharing the joys of a generous spirit”*

**November 14, 2010**

*Text: 2 Corinthians 8:1-7, Matthew 6:19-21*

### I.

I want to start off this morning with a question: *would it change your life in a good way if you were to win the lottery?* How big a jackpot, you ask? How about **\$11 million**? Would that be a good thing for you and your family?

We talk casually all the time about winning the lottery. Over the years, jokingly, people say to me, *when I win the lottery*, I'll pay off the church's mortgage or give half of it to the church for mission and evangelism. They're joking, of course; and, for sure, it's never happened.

But seriously—CHECK IT OUT—many people believe that an \$11 million lottery win would, in a heart beat, solve all their problems. Do we believe that?

On the one hand, I don't think any of us is going to turn down a winning \$11 million lottery ticket; but, on the other hand, do we really think our deepest problems in life—all our anxieties, worries and fears about the future, all of the personal challenges on our plate—can be solved with money?

My guess is there are a lot of people across America that think this, absolutely. At least, we'd sure like to give it a try:

*\$11 million, come on over and let's see what we can do.*

### II.

This past summer, an older Canadian couple from Nova Scotia won **\$11 million** in the July lottery. And interestingly enough, they've already given almost all of it away.

Seventy-eight year-old Violet Large was undergoing chemotherapy treatment for cancer when she and her husband, Allen, learned they'd won the July jackpot.

*It's not really that big a deal*, said her tearful husband, Allen. *What matters is that we have each other.*

In fact, once the reality of their winnings settled in, the responsibility of it all began to weigh on them.

*The money became a headache*, they told the local newspaper. It caused them a lot of anxiety; initially worrying about being taken advantage of; wanting to do the right thing.

Early on, as you'd imagine, they received all kinds of phone calls, making every imaginable appeal to their generosity. After a couple of weeks, they began an \$11 million donation plan to help others.

They helped out their family first and then began handing out donations to the two pages of groups they had decided to help out: the local fire dept., churches, cemeteries, the Red Cross, Salvation Army, a couple of local hospitals, organizations that fight cancer, Alzheimer's and diabetes.

In recent years, the couple have been busy attending to Violet's health. *Money can't buy you health or happiness*, she added.

As it turns out, they kept very little for themselves. People who know them say, *that's the kind of people they are; they're just happy to have each other.*

They both said, *It makes us feel good to be able to help in so many ways.*

### ***Sharing the joys of a generous spirit.***

True stories like this—stories of humble generosity—help us remember what's really important in life. Because at the end of the day, our lives are all about our relationships—our families and friends—and the love that feeds our spirit; the commitments and loyalties that bind us together.

Generosity is one of the cornerstone values of our Christian faith. Along with kindness, forgiveness and compassion, it is part of the *new life* God calls us to in Christ. To be Christian is to be generous, each of us doing our fair share in support of each other and in support of our church.

### III.

This is precisely what the Apostle Paul was encouraging in our reading from **2 Corinthians 8**. What this is about was a special offering Paul was taking up for the Jerusalem Church, the mother church back in Jerusalem that was led by **Peter, John and James** (the *pillars*) ... and which was notably poor.

Because Paul was *not* one of the original disciples (he never knew Jesus in the flesh), it was important to him, as an expression of solidarity with the mother church, to take up this offering (the **Jerusalem Collection**).

For him, the Collection symbolized that they were all ONE CHURCH ... and, therefore, Paul wanted all of the churches—particularly those churches he helped found—to do their fair share in giving to the Collection.

He wanted them to be eager and generous participants—to do their fair share in this special offering. To make his point, he reminds them how the churches of Macedonia—the churches at Philippi and Thessalonica—had given so sacrificially to the offering.

*Out of their poverty, they have given, says Paul. Their abundant joy and extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part.*

What Paul is encouraging in the Corinthians is our theme for Stewardship 2011, to **share the joys of a generous spirit**.

#### IV.

For us, on this Stewardship Sunday, what this is about—again—is each of us doing our fair share. We people of faith can relate to that. That was certainly the model in the early Christian communities that began to emerge soon after Jesus' death and resurrection ... when the believers felt this *presence* of the living Christ among them.

From **Acts 5**, CHECK IT OUT:

*Now the whole group of those who believed were of one heart and soul ... and they shared their possessions with one another. Again, this was the model in the early church.*

It's really that simple: when each one of us does our fair share—whatever it is ... and that's between us and God—the Church prospers, the sense of community deepens and there's celebrating in heaven.

Friends, this is it: if you attend here ... if this sacred space is where you meet God, where you feel the Spirit, then we're your church. And if we're your church, we're asking you to make a commitment.

Now, we all know—for many of us—these are difficult economic times. Fair enough; but, friends, God does not ask us to give out of what we don't have, but out of *what* we have, whatever it is. It's not about *how much*. It's about making some level of commitment.

#### V.

If you're new to our church, you need time to sort out your commitment. It is not our intent to rush any of us. But once you're on board with us, once you've decided that we're your church ... make a commitment.

What we're asking each of us to do today—on this Stewardship Sunday—is to make a pledge for 2011. That's why we're finishing the service today over in Fellowship Hall with a special observance: to symbolize that this is a shared endeavor. We're all in this

together. Hey, we can all give something. Whatever it is, God will bless it and it will be a blessing for us as well.

Remember, a pledge is not a contract; it's a commitment between us and God that can be adjusted up or down, as our personal circumstances dictate. The only thing you will ever receive from our church with regard to your giving is a record of what you have given—both as a reminder of where you are in your annual giving and for tax purposes. That's it.

The truth is, friends, people who pledge give more. Why, because they're giving, not based on when they attend, but based on a commitment. We can't all be here all the time. But still, the church goes on and our shared support is important.

## VI.

I want to finish up with these inspirational words from **1 Timothy 6**, where Timothy urges us, each one ...

*To do good, be rich in good works, and be generous and ready to share ...*

*And in this way store up for yourselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future, so you may take hold of the life that really is life.*

That's my wish for each of us, friends: that we **take hold of the life that really is life.** That we *share the joy of a generous spirit*, each of us doing our fair share in support of God's church; that God's purposes might continue to be realized both in us and through us, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

**All praise be unto God! Amen!**

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