

Dear Members and Friends of St. John,

As the Apostle Paul traveled to churches, he collected offerings for the Christians in Jerusalem who were experiencing hard economic times. When Paul was speaking to the Corinthians, he used the Macedonian believers as an example of people who, in spite of their own economic troubles, gave joyfully to the people in Jerusalem (see 2 Cor. 8:1-15). Scripture tells us that the Macedonian's were poor – actually even suffering from their poverty. Their love for Christ and their concern for their fellow believers moved them to give beyond their ability. They understood that sacrifice was part of serving the Lord. The Macedonians gave themselves first to the Lord, and then, Paul said, they *"urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the saints"* (2 Corinthians 8:4). In Christ, they saw their giving as an opportunity to help other believers in need – people that they would most likely never meet.

Does someone who views **giving as an obligation** plead for the opportunity to give? Probably not. When giving is an obligation, we will give, but giving as an obligation will not give us the joy or the attitude of pleading for the privilege to give as the Macedonians had. As God's people, we have both an obligation and an opportunity. Scripture is clear that we are called to give. Paul said, *"On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with his income, saving it up, so that when I come no collections will have to be made"* (1 Corinthians 16:2).

Giving is an obligation, but, just as God changed the hearts and minds of the Macedonian people, He changes us so we view **our giving as an opportunity** rather than an obligation. As renewed and transformed people, our attitudes toward giving change from a **"got to" to a "get to" attitude**. We stop giving grudgingly, and our giving comes from a grateful heart, so that we give willingly and cheerfully. We want to give, because giving is an expression of our love and gratitude to God for Who He is and what He does for us. The more we give of ourselves and our gifts the closer our relationship with Christ becomes and the more we want to give, and the more God blesses us, enabling our continued giving. *"You will be made rich in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God"* (2 Corinthians 9:11).

Michigan has been hard hit during this economic recession. Northern Michigan has been hurt significantly. But God continues to provide. Sure, we may not get everything that we ask for from our Lord, but He gives us what we need. Learning to **give as an opportunity** sets aside what we see as uncertainty in our future, realizing that our Lord is faithful and will provide. He always has. Worldly reason will tell us that we should hoard what we have – but then our trust no longer rests where it should be – in God's provision for us.

We thank God that He fills us daily with His love so that we as members of His Body here at our church see giving as a privilege and an opportunity to praise and thank Him. **Pray for a heart that is joy-filled and welcomes the chance to give back a portion of what God has provided for you.** May God richly bless you and help you in the months and years to come.

Pastor Travis