

Sowing Seeds of Hope
Christ Church
9 Nov 2014

2 Corinthians 9:6_15 The Message (MSG)

6_7 Remember: A stingy planter gets a stingy crop; a lavish planter gets a lavish crop. I want each of you to take plenty of time to think it over, and make up your own mind what you will give. That will protect you against sob stories and arm_twisting. God loves it when the giver delights in the giving.

8_11 God can pour on the blessings in astonishing ways so that you're ready for anything and everything, more than just ready to do what needs to be done. As one psalmist puts it,

He throws caution to the winds,
giving to the needy in reckless abandon.
His right_living, right_giving ways
never run out, never wear out.

This most generous God who gives seed to the farmer that becomes bread for your meals is more than extravagant with you. God gives you something you can then give away, which grows into full_formed lives, robust in God, wealthy in every way, so that you can be generous in every way,
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12_15 Carrying out this social relief work involves far more than helping meet the bare needs of poor [people]. It also produces abundant and bountiful thanksgivings to God. This relief offering is a prod to live at your very best, showing your gratitude to God by being openly obedient to the plain meaning of the Message of Christ. You show your gratitude through your generous offerings to your needy brothers and sisters, and really toward everyone. Meanwhile, moved by the extravagance of God in your lives,

they'll respond by praying for you ... for whatever you need. Thank God for this gift, his gift. No language can praise it enough!

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

8 And 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.

9 As it is written,

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

10 He 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.[b] 11 You will be enriched in every way for your great generosity, which will produce thanksgiving to God through us;

12 for the rendering of this ministry not only supplies the needs of the saints but also overflows with many thanksgivings to God.

13 Through 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, 14 while they long for you and pray for you because of the surpassing grace of God that he has given you. 15 Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!

Have you heard about Arnold Abbott, the activist in Fort Lauderdale, Florida who has been arrested for feeding the homeless? The 90_year_old man in white chef's apron who has been serving up gourmet_styled meals was committing a crime.

For more than two decades, the man many call "Chef Arnold" has proudly fired up his ovens to serve up four_course meals for the downtrodden who wander the palm_tree_lined beaches and parks of this sunny tourist destination.

Abbott and two South Florida ministers were arrested two weeks ago as they served up food. They were charged with breaking an ordinance restricting public feeding of the homeless. Each faces up to 60 days in jail and a \$500 fine.

In fact, Abbott and Black went back out for a feeding along Fort Lauderdale beach as police videotaped them serving up fresh_cooked entrees: a chicken_and_vegetable dish with broccoli sauce and a cubed ham_and_pasta dish Abbott said he topped with a "beautiful white onion celery sauce."

Nearly 100 mostly homeless people and some volunteers cheered his arrival in the park.

"God bless you, Arnold!" some in the crowd shouted.

"Thank God for Chef Arnold. I haven't eaten all day. He feeds a lot of people from the heart," said 56_year_old Eddie Hidalgo, who described himself as living on the streets since losing his job two years ago.

The police watched and waited while the people were fed, then they arrested the men. "I'm grateful that they allowed us to feed the people before they gave us the citation," Abbott said afterward. He has said feeding the homeless is his life's mission. (Huffington Post)

Chef Arnold is a WWII combat vet.

"I am not afraid at all. I was a combat infantryman for 2 1/2 years. I've spent 50 years fighting for civil rights for the minorities in this country. I don't have the slightest fear of being arrested," he told RT. "The only thing I am

concerned about is that there would be nobody to feed the homeless outdoors, which is what I do – and what I intend to do as long as there is breath in my body.” “I believe that I am my brother’s keeper. The name of our organization is ‘Love Thy Neighbor,’ and that’s what we do. We try to spread love, to help our fellow men,” he told RT.

“We have 10,000 homeless in Broward County, [and] most of them are in Fort Lauderdale, and we want to take care of all of our people. We are all God’s children.” (RT.com)

Chef Arnold certainly is a man who demonstrates radical, extravagant generosity. He feels blessed with a full life and wants to sow the seeds of love to all.

There is a mystery to reproduction and the miracle of growth. [Just think about it. The tiny seed has within it all the information it needs to grow into a tree, or grass, or an iris.] Botanists can’t explain exactly why a seed does this, sometimes growing from a very tiny speck of genetic information into a massive tree. (Rob Bell, Jr.) The same is true for us. We too start out as a tiny seed, and nourished, we grow into our wholeness, with the right soil and nurture, becoming the people God intends us to be.] In so many ways, we who are fortunate to have been nurtured well and are continually blessed by God’s “more than enough!” Because of this, Paul is reminding us to pay it forward. We are called to give generously.

I’m not always fully comfortable with some of the messages from scripture, including this morning’s. Paul has said, “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.” (The Message). We get the second part of the message about sharing with others, but we know that everyone does *not* share God’s blessings equally. Some have more than enough while others struggle desperately. I know that I’m supposed to pay it forward. I’m supposed to give to others. I’m supposed to be of service. It’s part of who I am. We are asked to do our part to try to set the balance straighter, to make things more fair, as God intended it. One of the things I really love about Christ Church is that we are a community of extravagant generosity.

We are a mission focused faith community. We are committed to being of service to others and demonstrate that in many ways. We take our gratitude for our many blessings seriously and follow the call just like Chef Arnold to be our brother’s keeper. Because of

the generosity of our members, we don't have a mortgage. We are currently able to pay our bills. AND, the more resources we have, the more we can do. And there's lots to be done in this troubled community and beyond. We are an active, energetic group of committed people who serve others in a variety of ways, as individuals, and as a community. A poem from Marge Piercy speaks to me about Christ Church

"To be of use" by Marge Piercy

The people I love the best
jump into work head first
without dallying in the shallows
and swim off with sure strokes almost out of sight.
They seem to become natives of that element,
the black sleek heads of seals
bouncing like half submerged balls.

I love people who harness themselves, an ox to a heavy cart,
who pull like water buffalo, with massive patience,
who strain in the mud and the muck to move things forward,
who do what has to be done, again and again.

I want to be with people who submerge
in the task, who go into the fields to harvest
and work in a row and pass the bags along,
who stand in the line and haul in their places,
who are not parlor generals and field deserters
but move in a common rhythm
when the food must come in or the fire be put out.

The work of the world is common as mud.
Botched, it smears the hands, crumbles to dust.
But the thing worth doing well done
has a shape that satisfies, clean and evident.
Greek amphoras for wine or oil,
Hopi vases that held corn, are put in museums
but you know they were made to be used.

The pitcher cries for water to carry
and a person for work that is real.

In honestly looking at the whole picture though, we also need to acknowledge that like many other churches today, we have seen a steady decline in our membership over the last 20 years. This is not just about us, but is a much wider cultural phenomenon. Many churches of all denominations are seeing their membership rolls slip. We have also been through transitions in pastoral leadership in the last few years which have shaken us. We recognize that we need to be open to discovering creative ways to open wide our doors, and take our message out into the community, to strengthen us and find ways to sustain our efforts into the future.

We have seeds, some that have not even been planted yet, that we hope will bloom into new possibilities.

We have been gifted with an opportunity to look at who we are and consider what some of our new steps might be. What seeds is God planting within us? What fruits are ripening in our hearts? How might we be able to serve the community even more? How might we open our doors more fully to the LGBTQ community? What else could we do to be better stewards of our mother earth? How might we be more vocal advocates for changes needed to insure a good future for our children and grandchildren? What creative ways can we explore to invite others to join us in these efforts?

As we bring our gifts and pledges for the coming year, let's remember, God has gifted us with many blessings and we are called to pay it forward. May our gifts strengthen and sustain us. May we be empowered and emboldened to step out in faith and hope. May we graciously serve our brothers and sisters. And may we grow fully into the people God intends us to be.

As we stand and sing together, let us remember that we are the seeds, like Chef Arnold. We are the fruit and the grain that can nourish the world.