

We want you to know, brothers and sisters, about the grace of God that has been granted to the churches of Macedonia; for during a severe ordeal of affliction, their abundant joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part. For, as I can testify, they voluntarily gave according to their means, and even beyond their means, begging us earnestly for the privilege of sharing in this ministry to the saints; and this, not merely as we expected; they gave themselves first to the Lord and, by the will of God, to us, so that we might urge Titus that, as he had already made a beginning, so he should also complete this generous undertaking among you. 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.

I do not say this as a command, but I am testing the genuineness of your love against the earnestness of others. 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. 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—now finish doing it, so that your eagerness may be matched by completing it according to your means. For if the eagerness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has—not according to what one does not have. 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 your present abundance and their need, so that their abundance may be for your need, in order that there may be a fair balance. 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.”

I have a dream, I have a vision. I have a vision of the world as a better place, the world as I believe God intended it to be. A world in which all of God’s children experience joy and blessing, love and kindness, a world in which everyone, man, woman, and child, everyone knows what it is to be blessed with unconditional love, blind loyalty, and unfailing trust. A world in which all people have a Welsh Corgi.

Now, I know that this dream of mine might be a bit of a nightmare for others—what with the shedding and all. But you know how it is, when you find something really great that makes you feel fantastic, you just want the whole world to know about it because you want others to feel the joy, and enjoy the blessing, you have found. It’s why we recommend new restaurants or lend a book to a friend or copy down a favorite recipe to share. When we’ve been blessed it’s quite natural that we want to extend that blessing to others. And because I have been so very blessed by the Welsh corgis that have come into my life over these past 10 years, I am always eager to recommend the breed to others. But what I really want others to experience is not, perhaps, the experience of having a Welsh Corgi, but rather what I want them to experience are the blessings I’ve enjoyed as a result of the experience of having corgis. I want other people to know what it’s like to have someone in your life who loves you no matter what. I want other people to know what it’s like to be forgiven even when you’ve been gone for over eight hours and didn’t arrange for anyone to let the dogs out. I want other people to know what it’s like to weep with sadness and be cheered by a funny dog licking the tears off your cheeks. I want other people to know the joy of what it feels like to be needed, to know what it feels like to be loved. And I guess there are other ways for folks to experience these blessings without actually having a Welsh Corgi, but having a corgi is an awfully good way to do it!

And in many ways, I feel about our church like I feel about Welsh Corgis—I have experienced so many blessings here, I am so grateful to God for what this church is and does, for me coming to this place when I did—that I just want to share the story of who and what we are with the world! I wish that others could experience this place, could be blessed by the blessings we enjoy here. But just like it’s unreasonable to think that every man, woman, and child needs a Welsh Corgi in order to feel loved and happy, so too is it unreasonable to think that every man, woman, and child needs to actually attend church here in order to be blessed by our blessings. Indeed, that thought is reflected in the brainstorming that happened at our first Vision Area Team meetings. So many of you brainstormed ways in which we can, as a church and individual participants in it, bless others outside of our church through sharing the blessings of time, talent, and treasure that we have been given. Not for the purposes of increasing church attendance or our own financial growth, but rather for the purposes of sharing the flavors of the kingdom of God that we have enjoyed with those who hunger and thirst for tastes of blessing, tastes of compassion, tastes of acceptance, and tastes of love.

And besides that, just like it is somewhat small-minded of me to think that everyone needs a Welsh Corgi to experience God's blessings, so would it be a bit misguided of us to think that everyone needs a church like ours to experience God's blessings. Indeed, on this world communion Sunday, we stop to think about the diversity of blessings that God bestows upon the church in its many expressions across the globe. And what is true now was certainly true when the church was in its infant stages as revealed to us in today's letter from the apostle Paul to the members of the church in Corinth.

Paul is writing to the Corinthians while in Macedonia. He is in the midst of supporting a campaign to raise funds to support the church in Jerusalem, sort of the mother ship of the early Christian church if you will. In his letter to the Corinthians—who are living in a community enjoying robust economic growth—he lifts up the example of the generosity of the people of the Macedonian Church—a church situated in a community facing severe economic hardship. And Paul writes, “for during a severe ordeal of affliction, [the Macedonians'] abundant joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part. For, as I can testify, they voluntarily gave [to the campaign for the church in Jerusalem] according to their means, and even beyond their means, begging us earnestly for the privilege of sharing in this ministry to the saints . . .” It is tempting to think of this verse in strictly financial terms—that the Macedonians gave money to the church in Jerusalem, even beyond their means, in order to support the church of Jesus Christ. And while this is true, the Macedonians gave so much more. As a scholar on the passage writes “It is peculiar to think of deep poverty overflowing into wealth, but here the riches are emphatically not the gifts of the Macedonians, however substantial they may have been. They are the divine gifts of joy and single-hearted generosity. It is precisely the fact that the Macedonians give out of poverty and not out of wealth that makes their gift a manifestation or sign of God's grace . . .”<sup>1</sup>

The Macedonians begging Paul to allow them to help—long after they have “paid their fair share”—reminds me of the story about a LouBrenda Duffy, a single mother who two, who participated in the Habitat for Humanity program and, after putting in the 350 hours of sweat equity that was required of her in order to have a Habitat home, she just kept on going. Long after she and her daughters had settled into their new home, LouBrenda just kept on volunteering—helping others to build their homes and even volunteering the use of her own home for Habitat meetings. Like the Macedonians, LouBrenda kept on giving long after she had “paide her fair share.”

The picture that Paul is painting is a picture of the Kingdom of God—not as we sometimes think of it—as heaven or the after life—but rather the Kingdom of God, the one that exists right here and right now, the one in which we participate when we catch glimpses and tastes the flavors of abundant grace. Indeed, as we heard from Scott this morning when he read to us from the creation story, God is so very gracious and created a world of abundance—“Out of the ground the Lord God made to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food . . . Out of the ground the Lord God formed every animal of the field and every bird of the air . . .” God didn't just create an apple tree and a Welsh corgi—though that would be enough for me—but God created an abundance of plants and foods, animals and people. God wants us to enjoy the abundance of creation and Paul offers us advice on how to do so. There are blessings that others have that we don't have, and won't have, unless we allow others to reach out to us. There are blessings that we have, that's other's won't have, unless we reach out to them. As Paul writes, “The one who had much did not have too much, and the one who had little did not have too little.” It's reminds me of the recurring line from the Three Bears fairy tale—“And it was just right.” In the Kingdom of God—everything is just right—no one is burdened by having too much—no one is suffering by having to little. In the Kingdom of God, everything is just right.”

And when I read what has come out of our Vision Process so far, I read of a congregation that wishes to participate in a community in which, though everything is not “just right”, we want to share the abundance of

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our blessings in ways that make things a lot “more right”; to share in ways that allow others to realize and recognize the abundance of God’s blessings. In ways that help us to recognize that we don’t have the corner on being blessed—but rather that Christ came to save us all, Christ gave his all for all, and God wants nothing less than for all of God’s children to enjoy the abundance of creation and to enjoy that abundance together through the sharing of time, talent, and treasure.

I have a dream, I have a vision. I have a vision of the world as a better place, the world as I believe God intends it to be. A world in which all of God’s children experience joy and blessing, love and kindness, a world in which every man, woman, and child, knows what it is to be blessed with unconditional love, blind loyalty, and unfailing trust. A world that is a reflection of the Kingdom of God and when God’s will is done here on earth as it is in heaven, all will have enough, everything will be “just right”. But until God’s vision becomes a reality, we have the vision God is giving us. And as Paul writes, it’s time “now to finish doing it so that our eagerness may be matched by completing it according to our means.” And we did that with our last vision—we completed it according to our means—thanks be to God. But now it’s time to continue, to carry on as the Macedonians did, not because we must, but because we may. Because we have a vision of a community that, “because we have been blessed, we wish to be a blessing.” We thank God by blessing others with the abundance of blessings we’ve been given, it’s how we participate in the kingdom of God. Well, that and by being loved by a Welsh corgi. We have a dream. We have a vision. And it’s coming true right here and right now. Thanks be to God.