

# **The Fourth Sunday After Pentecost**

## **July 2, 2006**

### **Proper 8**

## **Giving to the Poor, Your Neighbor Who is Your Neighbor?**

**Deuteronomy 15:7-11: Forgiving a Debt**: If one Jew gave another food and supplies to enable the person to survive until the next harvest, then one is encourage to forgive the debt under the commandment of loving one's neighbor.

### **2 Corinthians 8:1-9, 13-15: Helping a Distant Neighbor:**

#### **A. Corinth:**

##### 1. **City**:

- A Roman Colony in 44 BC.
- An international crossroads of commerce, as it was SW of the Corinthian Gulf and NW of the Saronic Gulf, and sat between the Adriatic Sea leading to Europe and the Aegean Sea leading to Asia.
- All the vices and crimes associated with such a bustling city were typical in Corinth. To have it said that you lived like a Corinthian was an insult, and to live like a Corinthian woman was tantamount to being called a prostitute.
- The population was 300,000 plus 460,000 slaves.
- The walls of the city were 6 miles long.
- It was the 3<sup>rd</sup> largest city in the Roman Empire, only Rome and Alexandria being larger.
- There was a large forum in Corinth, around which were numerous shops, fountains and toilets.

##### 2. **Temples**: were many, such as the

- Temple of Asclepius (the first hospital, where medicine was practiced), the
- Temple of Athena (the oldest temple in Greece), and a huge temple built during the reign of Tiberius to worship the Emperor.
- The Temple that gave Paul the most difficulty was that of Aphrodite, the goddess of love, where 1,000 temple priestesses served essentially as prostitutes, the form of worship being to emulate the creativity of the gods. It was relatively small, being 33' by 52'.

#### **B. Church in Corinth:**

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### 2. Priscilla and Aquila:

- It was probably simply the group of people called Christians who met in the home of two rich converts, Priscilla and Aquila (*her name is mentioned first as she came from a wealthy family*), who had just arrived in Corinth having been expelled from Rome by Emperor Claudius because they were Jewish.
- They owned a large shop making tents (as did Paul) and leather goods, the shop being divided between a store downstairs and living quarters upstairs. The church service would meet in the downstairs store area on Sundays.
- The store area would be 14' wide and 24' long, so able to accommodate a decent number of people.

3. First Corinthians: was written in 54 AD in response to a letter asking many questions, such as regarding having a Eucharistic meal with separate tables, one for the rich and one for the poor. Also, they viewed love as primarily sexual, and so Paul would give them a more spiritual definition, this being the famed passage read at most weddings.

4. Second Corinthians: was written in 56 AD dealing with people who questioned Paul's authority, primarily Jews coming from outside the city who claimed that Paul was either an affront to the Jewish tradition, or not one of the original Apostles if from the Christian tradition.

5. Collection: At the time Paul wrote his epistle, there was a famine in certain sections of the empire. It was affecting Jerusalem, and so Paul was raising funds to help the people there from the peoples wherever he traveled. He wrote the epistle from Macedonia (northern Greece in Philippi and Thessalonica) encouraging the people of Corinth (southern Greece) to match their generosity.

### Mark 5:22-24, 35b-43: Faith will Save:

#### 1. The Hemorrhaging Woman:

- a. In Leviticus, a woman who hemorrhaged was considered unclean, and so anything or anyone she touched would also be unclean.
- b. Thus, to touch the cloak of Jesus could have been seen as offensive, but Jesus pays more attention to her faith, and less to the archaic law.
- c. Here the connection is that faith is not created due to the miracle, but is a required precursor of the miracle.
- d. Also, Jesus is wandering through the countryside, and so sees these strangers as neighbors, worthy of love and healing.

#### 2. Jairus' Daughter:

- a. When Jairus is told that his daughter is dead, Jesus tells the crowd that she is merely asleep. The crowd does not believe, and mocks Jesus. Jairus, the father, believes and his faith leads to the miracle.
- b. Another interesting aspect of the miracle is common sense, Jesus telling the parents to feed the girl upon raising her from the dead. Hence, Jesus is down here with us, not preaching a spiritual message with no connection to the daily drudgery that we often face.

**What about giving to those who ask us for help?**

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Charity or Rip Off?**

**QUESTION:** *I work in New York, and daily I get hounded by people on every street corner asking for money. I usually don't give them anything, but always feel like a crumb. How do I know who to help?*

**ANSWER:** Your experience is common. You feel angry at being embarrassed and inconvenienced, but then guilty for not being more compassionate. Yet, as you debate how much to give, it occurs to you that the tale of woe to which you are listening may be phony, and you begin to get angry again. Yet, you want to avoid a scene, so often you give just enough to get the person standing ever so close to you off your back. Then you resolve that the next time you will do a better job of ducking when you see them coming.

Oh, but there again is your guilt! You know that you are asked to love your neighbor as yourself (Mt. 22: 34-40), to be a Good Samaritan (Lk. 10: 29-37), and to do so without bragging (Mt. 6: 2-4). But, while you do not necessarily mind giving, you do mind being “ripped off”. So, what can you do?

A beginning rule of thumb is to only give to those in genuine need. Someone at work or in your congregation has lost their house due to fire, their job due to layoffs, or their savings due to a prolonged illness. The need is clear, and you should give.

However, it is unlikely that you will have even the slightest hint that the story that you hear from a stranger on the street is genuine. Rather than playing detective by asking twenty questions, or looking like the reincarnation of Ebenezer Scrooge by summarily dismissing a plaintive cry for help as the devious act of a pest, why not refer that person

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to the appropriate local agency. If they are stranded away from home, refer them to Travelers Aid. If they are in need of clothing, send them to the Salvation Army or the nearest church or synagogue that may have a Thrift Shop. If they need additional money for food or shelter, refer them to the Department of Social Services or the nearest hostel for the poor. If you do not know where to refer them, suggest that they inquire at the nearest church, synagogue, or social service agency.

I realize that while you are trying your best to think of the most appropriate place to send that person, he or she is probably groaning or openly complaining that all they want is money. But, if their need is genuine, they will recognize your effort to help. If it is not, you will have to be more assertive, restating clearly and calmly that you are not going to give them money.

Finally, you need to know that you cannot give to everyone, so set your priorities. After you take care of your family, give to your congregation and your favorite charity, what is left may not be very much. *How* you determine your limitations is a matter of conscience; *that* you determine them is a matter of practicality.

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