



This is the last of our four sermons in our Fresh Wind series, where we have been studying people in the book of Acts who lived out generosity.

We looked at the early church and men like Ananias and Barnabas AND how God Himself is lavishly generous, and how we can be generous toward Him and toward others in response. God is always sending a Fresh Wind into the sails of our souls for refreshment, direction, encouragement, and inspiration to do something beautiful for Him.

Let's read one of our Bible passages for today. Grab your Bibles to take notes in the margin or to underline words. It's a good habit to have. Turn to the book of Acts, chapter 16, beginning with verse 9.

Acts 16:9-10

During the night Paul had a vision of a man of Macedonia standing and begging him, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." After Paul had seen the vision, we got ready at once to leave for Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them.

Acts 16:11-12

From Troas we put out to sea and sailed straight for Samothrace, and the next day we went on to Neapolis. From there we traveled to Philippi, a Roman colony and the leading city of that district of Macedonia. And we stayed there several days.

Acts 16:13-15

On the Sabbath we went outside the city gate to the river, where we expected to find a place of prayer. We sat down and began to speak to the

women who had gathered there. One of those listening was a woman from the city of Thyatira

named Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth. She was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul's message. When she and the members of her household were baptized, she invited us to her home. "If you consider me a believer in the Lord," she said, "come and stay at my house." And she persuaded us.

Lydia was the very first convert in Macedonia. If you have the name Lydia, that is a great name. It means "beautiful one" or "noble one." We once did a church tour in Philippi's city in Greece to a stream where Lydia's family might have gotten baptized. Many of those on tour either got baptized or renewed their commitment of baptism. We also thought of that historical time when the gospel spread to this northern part of Greece, and the first convert was baptized in possibly the same stream we were at. And we sang a song in a church in that Philippian Church in Macedonia that honored Lydia and our Lord.

Her conversion kicked off the beginning of the Macedonian churches that included the cities of Philippi, Thessalonica, and Berea. When Lydia enthusiastically embraced the gospel and had all of her family converted and baptized, something fresh and delightful and supernatural happened to those churches. It was a fresh wind of the Spirit. They became strong, faithful, and incredibly generous to help others, even though they were in a tough spot themselves.

Let me tell you about the area. Macedonia was on the great plains of Thessalonica. It was known for timber

and precious metals. It sloped up into the river valleys in what was called the Balkan Mountains. That's the pretty part. But then, just as our nation and other countries today are going through really difficult times due to economic stress and disease and tremendous heartache, so were the churches of Macedonia. And yet, they were generous to help others. These beleaguered churches chose....chose to be generous to give money to the bigger Jerusalem church to help the poor.

Read this - the strange case of the Macedonian churches as reported in the Bible, in a letter Paul wrote, in his second letter to the Corinthians, in a section called 2 Corinthians Chapter 8 beginning with verse 1.

2 Corinthians 8:1-7

And now, brothers and sisters, we want you to know about the grace that God has given the Macedonian churches. In the midst of a very severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity. For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability. Entirely on their own, they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the Lord's people. And they exceeded our expectations: They gave themselves first of all to the Lord, and then by the will of God also to us. So we urged Titus, just as he had earlier made a beginning, to bring also to completion this act of grace on your part. But since you excel in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in complete earnestness and in the love we have kindled in you—see that you also excel in this grace of giving.

2 Corinthians 8:8-9

I am not commanding you, but I want to test the sincerity of your love by comparing it with the earnestness of others. For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich.

This is such a crazy, courageous story of faith of those Macedonians. Let's take a look at this verse by verse.

First, in verse two, we see that *"In the midst of a very severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity."*

Let's break it down.

The phrase "very severe trial" in Greek is more literally translated "a great testing of affliction."

The Greek word for testing is "dokime," So what does that mean? In the Greek language this letter was written, the word "dokime" means the kind of testing that will prove someone's or something's worth or genuineness. A test of one's fortitude, one's metal.

It was a great testing during the fire of affliction. What kind of affliction were the Macedonian churches going through? It is believed it could have been persecution for being Christian or a bad economy. But whatever it was, it brought them into extreme poverty due to the loss of jobs.

Let's look at the verse again:

2 Corinthians 8:2

In the midst of a very severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity.

Sorry to bring in the Greek again....I have to use it now and then since I studied this ancient Biblical language for a couple of years....The phrase extreme poverty literally means "down-to-the-depth poverty." Or if I were to try to impress you, it's the phrase: he kata bathous ptochecheia. Try ordering that the next time you are in a Greek restaurant! And see if you get lamb.

No, seriously, it means down-to-the-depth poverty. But this is what is so stunning.

2 Corinthians 8:2

In the midst of a very severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty (he kata bathous ptochecheia) welled up in rich generosity.

How could this be? How could these poor churches, who were under physical hardship, and persecution, and poverty, well up in overflowing JOY AND RICH GENEROSITY, and then give money to the poor in

Jerusalem for a people they had probably never met or would know?

Their poverty, their difficult circumstances, did not take away their joyfulness, nor did it diminish in any way their generosity. Incredible!

All week I have been thinking, why...why would they have this kind of joyful reaction when they heard the call for help through their leader Paul to help the bigger, main church of Jerusalem? How could one be generous in the midst of trial and affliction?

Here's my take. In a letter to the church in Rome, Paul once again mentioned the stunningly generous churches in Macedonia when he wrote:

Romans 15:26

For Macedonia and Achaia were pleased to make a contribution for the poor among the Lord's people in Jerusalem.

Why would the Macedonian churches be so JOYFULLY generous in the midst of what commentator Philipp Hughes translates it as "rock bottom poverty?" They weren't always poor, but they were going through a season of great economic strife. How and why would they do this? Why not just take care of their own....their own family....their own neighborhood...their own friends?

Here is my conclusion and belief.

Number one priority in their lives, they gave themselves FIRST to the Lord. The Macedonians were all in for the Lord. They leaned into the Lord! When one makes the decision to give yourself first to the Lord, then everything else falls into line BEHIND that decision – our social spending, how and what we eat, the things we buy, the cars we drive, the kinds of condos or houses we purchase or apartments we rent. Our calendar and checkbook registers should all show that we give ourselves FIRST to the Lord.

Starting with Lydia, the seller of purple goods, it was no surprise she was passionate about sharing her faith with all of her family. They all got baptized because now the Lord would be FIRST in their household.

Numero uno! What she heard in the good news of Christ she immediately and joyfully wanted to share with others.

When we give first to the Lord, we drop everything when someone wants to ask us about Jesus. When we know, there is a call to help the poor, whether through donation or food delivery. Or to help the environment, or we hear of bullying behavior, we immediately pray to ask how do I respond to that if the Lord is primary in my life?

Today is a call to ask again, is Jesus Christ primary in our life? Do we give first to the Lord, and then everything else we spend on is secondary? Can we remember that Christ gave up everything for us on a cross? The one we call Lord, our Lord, suffered and died for us. He had a generous love for us, a generous love that He would want His followers to have.

Second, the Macedonians gave on their own accord. Where did this idea come from? Entirely on their own! No one forced them to do it. They heard of the need, and they responded - all three churches.

They could have responded by saying, why should we, the smaller churches, give to that big fat cat Jerusalem Church? They have much more than we do already, and they got all of those superstar Christians, like James the blood brother of Jesus Christ, and Peter, James, John – all those super-apostles? Everyone talks about Jerusalem. Don't hear anyone talking about the Macedonian Churches or Thessalonica.

No, they gave of their own accord. They wanted to.

Third, they gave beyond their ability. Here's the verse.

2 Corinthians 8:3

For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability.

Holy mother of pearl! They were rock-bottom, dirt poor, or that translation again – down to the depth poverty. But they gave beyond their ability. Somehow they knew of the call for a need....and they had already decided to give themselves first to the Lord even at a time of persecution for their faith and economic distress. They leaned into God and not into their own

circumstances of suffering and poverty. First to God, and then to His Church in Macedonia and in Jerusalem. How were they equipped and mentored in this?

I am reminded of what Paul wrote in another letter, and maybe they had learned this from Paul on a previous trip. Paul wrote:

2 Corinthians 9:6-8

Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to bless you abundantly, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work.

That passage kind of captures the first three points, doesn't it? Give to God because He is first. Give of your own accord, not under compulsion, but give cheerfully. And suppose you choose to give even above your ability. In that case, you will be blessed abundantly, for if you sow generously, you will reap generously.

The Macedonians had truly learned the gift of generosity that is so freeing. The longer I am a Christian, the more generous I have become. To live a generous lifestyle has tremendous liberty. And the Macedonians say that even if you are poor, you can be generous to God, His family of believers, and others. One may be poor but can still have a wealth of liberality.

The last and fourth point is that the Macedonians PLEADED, yes PLEADED for the privilege to give.

2 Corinthians 8:4

They urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the Lord's people.

They were like an athlete on the bench saying to the coach – Play me! Send me in! I got gifts and talents to give and share! Call on me!!! They begged to be put in the game. The Macedonians might have been

poor....they were the player with holes in their athletic shoes and maybe a torn jersey, but they wanted to play. They would be the antsy basketball player on the bench saying, play me, I plead with you, play me, give me a shot, I can make a difference. Please, I beg you, let me be part of the action!

The Macedonians were saying, please let us share in the privilege....yes the privilege of being part of a generous offering to the Lord's church. They didn't focus on their circumstances. They didn't focus on reasons not to give. They focused and PLEADED for creative ways to give for Jesus was first and foremost in their lives.

It's like the high school football player who sees his team behind by 21 points at the beginning of the 4th quarter who runs up to his coach on the sideline with helmet in hand and says, "Coach, please send me in." Then he puts on his helmet, "Coach, please let me play." Then he snaps on his chin strap, "Coach, I'm pleading you with you. I can make a difference. Let me in. Let me play!"

There are mighty challenges that are facing us. This is a tough economic time. This is a tough medical time. But there is a Fresh Wind blowing. And there may be a voice in you that says, "Lord, send me into the game. I want to play. I want to lean in on my faith."

There is a Fresh Wind blowing in our church with great opportunity of the campus and new property, and new possibilities.

The Holy Spirit is leading us in some very exciting things in our church ministries.

You have heard that our online services have grown by 60 percent plus. You have heard that hundreds have committed their lives to Christ since March. You have heard that God has expanded the use of our property. It all means more cost for more opportunity.

You know of the capital needs for the building. You know of the new ministries we have opened trying to serve everyone online. While also offering in-person options in serving the poor, with young adults and

ohana ministries presentations, with a public prayer walk which hundreds of you took advantage of.

Today is Commitment Sunday. Commitment Sunday is when we prayerfully respond to God's call to take the next step in our two-year Raise the Sails generosity journey. We started Raise the Sails in late 2019, and right now, we're marking the midpoint of the journey.

Just to give some context to those who are not familiar with Raise the Sails

The first goal of Raise the Sails is 100% engagement—meaning we hope that all of us —whether you're new or you've been with us for a while—will be part of it so that we can grow together in learning about faith and generosity and how to live it out.

The second goal of Raise the Sails is to raise money for the campus and building needs, ministry operations, and new ministry initiatives. And we actually started Raise the Sails BEFORE we knew of the exciting opportunities of access to the golf course in which God might be leading us.

So today, Commitment Sunday, we're committing to taking our next steps.

Suppose you're new to First Prez, or you were not with us in November 2019 when we made commitments. Today is an opportunity to JOIN the journey and make a one-year commitment to Raise the Sails and join us for this second year. We could use your Macedonian help.

It's a one-year commitment from this point ... and it would include what you might normally tithe or give weekly or monthly to First Prez from December 2020 through December 2021, PLUS what you sense the Lord might be prompting you to give in addition to that. All one amount and a commitment to give that amount over one year.

And as it is our custom at our church, only our bookkeeper will know what you commit. I won't know; none of our pastoral staff will know, just the bookkeeper since she is the one who mails you the

receipt when your gifts are received for tax-deductible purposes.

If you need more info about RAISE THE SAILS, please visit our website: www.raisethesails.org

Then there are those of you who are at the midpoint of our two-year journey, meaning—you already made a commitment of your total tithes for 2021, plus an additional gift. I am asking you today to AFFIRM that commitment by filling out the card AGAIN. Lean into the winds of the Spirit and finish strong on the commitment you started last year.

If by chance you can't remember your pledge amount, you can contact our bookkeeper Debbie at dentacct@hawaii.rr.com or 808-836-9995.

I realize some of you might have to modify that commitment due to circumstances. But whatever you do, please fill out the card again and lean in and finish strong in that commitment to the Lord.

And finally, some of you might be able to EXPAND your commitment of what you stated last year. You're saying; honestly, I can do more. I think God is stretching me, and I would like to increase my commitment. And I will be one of those people.

For whatever stage you are at, I pray that you answer the Lord with a Macedonian spirit. The Lord knows what we have. And He knows our hearts.

This is our day....our chance to be like the Macedonians. To plead for the privilege, to play and participate of our own accord, to maybe give beyond our human ability. But mostly to know that we give ourselves first to the Lord and that our gifts reflect that.

If you have the commitment card in front of you, please fill it out right now. If not, you can fill the card out on line. Just click, or copy and paste the following link into your browser. <https://www.raisethesails.org/commit>

During last year's Commitment Sunday, we all walked down to the front of the sanctuary and put our

commitment cards in a big koa bowl. But today, with us not being in-person, we need to do it differently.

Take your time to think and pray about your commitment that you are writing. As truly we pray that what we are doing right now, truly glorifies God.

Let us pray.

Lord, we pray as we think about our commitment that we are about to write down that we can give cheerfully with faith and that it reflects our deep gratitude to You for all that You have done in our lives...and that it reflects what You are doing through First Prez and we want to be part of building Your church to maintain and expand the ministries You are laying out before us.

May we like the Macedonians be pleading with You to say we want to be a part of us....we want to play...we want to have a piece of the Rock on which You are building your Church....we want to make a major difference, we are on your team, Lord. We want to lean in of our love to You, so Lord, may this commitment reflect our deep love and faith in You.

Lord, we have stated our commitment on our own accord, we have asked for the privilege to give as it is our privilege to participate in the joy of generosity....and may our commitments and gifts show that we always have given ourselves first to You. In Christ's name, Amen.

Thank you all for your commitments. It means a lot to the Lord.

By the way. Last weekend, we had more than 400 people turned up for the church's largest prayer gathering as we walked out on our property calling out to the Lord to ask Him to bless our land and give us a word as to what He might want us to do with our now newly accessible 246 acres that will be part of our church ministry. There was praying and praising and joy to see each other in person...and yes there was even singing. To watch the video, you can find the link in the Note section of this sermon.

Please receive this blessing:

May the Lord bless you and keep you. May His grace and countenance be upon you. And may you know deep in your heart the joy of generosity and the love of God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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Note: Sunday sermon texts, as well as audio and video recordings of sermons, are available at www.fpchawaii.org/messages.

You can also listen to the sermon podcast by simply clicking on this link: <https://soundcloud.com/first-prez-honolulu/a-generous-macedonian-spirit-112220>

For the latest resources on how to connect from home, join a small group, or helping out in the community, visit our website at <https://www.fpchawaii.org/connect-from-home>

To watch our Fresh Wind Prayer Walk video, click on this link: <https://vimeo.com/482539836> or copy and paste the link into your browser.