

**November 19, 2017  
2 Corinthians 9:6-15  
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**“With a Grateful Heart”**

**Good morning! If you have been paying attention to the order of service listed in your bulletin, you may have a question about now: What’s the difference between a sermon and a meditation? The answer is: about five minutes. Shorter. I suspect that many of you will be grateful for this, but I don’t want our abbreviated time table this morning to give you the impression that I think the topic of gratitude is unimportant, or something we can cover in less than ten minutes. Gratitude is a topic which merits our consideration every day, but it’s good to have a holiday and maybe even a season when we are reminded to give thanks with a grateful heart.**

**Our text from 2 Corinthians is just one of many, many biblical texts which talk about the abundance of God’s blessings and how we should respond to that. It is also one of a number of Old and New Testament scriptures which uses the image of planting and harvesting. In a pre-scientific agrarian culture, the transformation of seed into plant into many heads of grain must have seemed almost magical. I confess that I am amazed by it still: golden grain, vine-ripened tomatoes, trees heavy with fruit -- no wonder these things were used to illustrate the abundance of God’s blessings. Well, tomatoes aren’t in the Bible, but if they’d had tomatoes and zucchini in 1<sup>st</sup> century Palestine, I’m pretty sure they would have been included. Anyone who has planted zucchini knows that abundance comes in many varieties. Every Sunday, and any other day, is an opportunity to acknowledge and thank God.**

**This morning I want to focus particularly on 2 Corinthians 9:7 which talks about not only what we give back to God, but how we do it. Paul writes, “Each of you must give as you have made up your mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.”**

**Rather than telling you what I think you ought to do: be cheerful! be grateful! I want to share a conversation that I had years ago: probably almost 20 years ago now , but it made a big impression on me at the time, and it gave me an image which continues to be meaningful to me when I consider what it means to offer God my love and praise.**

**I had a friend Jackie who was, and I'm sure still is, a gifted artist: she did intricate pen and ink drawings, colored with colored pencil. She often did series of pictures -- there was a series on bread and biblical texts about bread, and a series on the story of Noah. She often designed her pieces with a place for a title or a biblical text, and we'd get together so I could add my lettering to her artwork. We'd talk about the financial and spiritual challenges of being a Christian artist: on this particular day I was wound up about my work not being good enough to offer to God. It wasn't flawless, I still had so much to learn, there were other people whose work was so much better than mine. . . . blah blah blah. Jackie let me talk for a while, and when I started to run out of steam, she said, "You know, the way I look at it, we're all just putting up pictures on God's refrigerator."**

**I hope at some time in your life, you have had a niece or nephew, child or grandchild, or a young friend you know who gave you a photograph of themselves or a drawing they made. I can name people in this congregation who have had photos of my children on their refrigerator. I visited someone this week who had a photo of my son, Joel, on her bookcase. I'm sure she didn't put it out because I was coming -- it made my day. If you put a kids' drawing on your refrigerator, it probably isn't because of the artistic merit of that drawing. It isn't because it's the best use of color, or the most accurate rendering of the subject. Maybe you can't even tell what it's supposed to be. We put pictures on our refrigerators because of relationship: If you're important to me, when you give me something that you made because you care about me, you'd better believe I'm going to put it up where everyone can see it. It isn't about how "good" -- how skillfully executed -- the picture is, it's about the heart of the child who gave it to you.**

**We are God's children: God doesn't want our obligation; and certainly not our reluctance. It isn't about what the other people around us are giving. Our care and preparation are part of what we offer to God, but**

**if what we give is about our performance and how long it took to prepare and whether we did it just right -- we have lost the joy of a grateful heart. And if we lose gratitude, we've missed the point. God doesn't need our pictures, God wants our joy and love -- and the more we give, the more we'll have.**

**I want to leave you with mystery: the surest path to gratitude for the big things is through gratitude for the small things. God has given us so much: this world, the people whom we love, the gift of life here and now and the gift of eternal life in Jesus Christ. This can be so much to imagine that it can get lost in the weight of everyday life: it's cold outside; I hate scraping the windshield in the morning, my back hurts, the kids only call when they need money . . . those are real things -- at least for some of us -- but if that's all we can see, then we have lost track of the abundance we have been given and the abundance we have to share.**

**This week as you prepare for Thanksgiving, I invite you to put up a picture on God's refrigerator. Do something small with enthusiasm and abandon; make a mess; sing. It doesn't have to be an actual picture; a prayer will do. When you get out of bed, thank God for the new day, and that you haven't messed it up yet. Be kind to someone who doesn't deserve it. Remember that God loves you and that each one of us is given the opportunity to love God back. Remember that Jesus has forgiven you, and you could let go of that grudge you've been carrying. Remember that the Holy Spirit is with you, and there is light at the end of the tunnel. God has given to us abundantly so that we can share that abundance with others. Choose as many small things as you can to be grateful for, because all those small things add up to a grateful heart. And a grateful heart is the offering God wants from us. Amen.**