

Thirteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time, Cycle B

2Corinthians 8:7, 9, 13-15 and Mark 5:21-43

One bitterly cold morning, a young man begged on the corner. His coat was just a hoodie; his bare hands were chapped and bleeding. I held them as I told him about the local social service agencies. As I ran to get him coffee, I thought about giving him my gloves. Then I thought about how hard it had been to find those gloves. I gave him some cash instead. Ten minutes later, I was angry enough with myself that I took the gloves to the street corner. Too late! The young man was gone. What had held me back? True, I did more than most people who walked past him that morning. True, the gift would not have changed anything significantly. Yet, I wonder about that barrier in me, my hesitancy to give.

2Cor 8 looks at that barrier. The backstory here is that Jerusalem Christians were poor and Paul rallied other Christian communities to send money to help. The Corinthians had promised to give generously but had not followed through. Here Paul encourages them to make good on their promises. Just before our passage, he pointed out how less wealthy churches in Macedonia had already donated. What if the Macedonians find out that the Corinthians have not done so as well? We can ask ourselves, "Would competition help us give?" Next Paul tries winning the Corinthians' good will by listing qualities they excel in; this rhetorical ploy says, "See how virtuous you are! Add generosity to your list." We can ask if knowing that generosity makes us look good would prompt us to give. Next, Paul plays his trump card, Jesus Christ gave his life to save us. If Jesus gave so unstintingly, shouldn't we?

Paul knows that any argument for generosity will arouse defensiveness, so he parries the unspoken counterargument that we must take care of ourselves: "not that others should have relief while you are burdened." No one is asking the rich to fail to take care of themselves; rather, this is "a matter of equality." Jesus' superlative generosity has consequences for the Christian community. Although we may see community as a place to compete, to get ahead, to have someone in our debt, in reality everyone is sometimes in need and sometimes can give. Jesus' unstinting love – a love he requires of his disciples – sees *everyone* as deserving of circumstances in which they can flourish (Jn 10:10). We are the instruments by which Jesus bestows fullness of life. Paul concludes by noting that God has been speaking this gospel of generosity since the Exodus. When God provided manna every day for forty years, no one needed to grab for more and no one went short. The inequality we have created is not how community works for God nor, ultimately, for us.

The flipside of being able to give is our openness to receive; it likewise indicates our connectedness to God, as we see in our gospel passage. The woman is perfectly open. Her suffering has become her name, "the woman with the hemorrhage." The long-term bleeding points to a gynecological problem, which made her unclean and cut her off from social support. Medical malpractice worsened her condition and impoverished her. Suffering has stripped away all concern for social morés. The woman accepts the reality of her need and that only Jesus can heal her. This is perfect faith. Jesus renames her and declares, "Daughter, your faith has saved you." If only we all could be open this way!

Jairus is more like most of us. He has faith enough to seek Jesus' help, but he has waited so long to ask that his daughter dies. He has surrounded himself with people just as restricted by their inability to receive. They send word, "Your daughter is dead; why trouble the teacher any longer?" but when all hope is lost is precisely when we need to trouble Jesus! These friends even ridicule Jesus. Jairus is constrained by human-made rules about who is able to give and receive. Notice the contrast: the woman makes all the effort to reach Jesus, while Jairus, the leader of the synagogue, the one who should have exemplary faith, needs Jesus to walk the distance, fight the crowd, shore up Jairus' faith and come into the inner room of the house. And that is okay! The deepest beauty of this entwined story is that Jesus fills in whatever we need. Jairus had enough faith to get himself to Jesus and Jesus did the rest. The generosity of God is laid bare before us. What are we waiting for?

- ❖ What holds you back from being more generous with the needy?
- ❖ What holds you back from accepting help?