

Summertime Relief

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.” --2nd Corinthians 8:10-11

These words from Paul’s letters to the Corinthian church written to them so long ago speak clearly and directly to our context this summer. Paul’s purpose in writing was to encourage a relatively poorer congregation in Macedonia to take up a collection for the congregation in Jerusalem experiencing the deprivations of persecution. It seems they had started strong, but the burden of shame at their poverty was slowing them down. Paul understood their situation intimately and was able to encourage them: “Now as you excel in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in great exertion, and in your love for us—so we want you to excel in this generous undertaking” (verse 7). He is gentler in his time than it sounds to our ears, but aware how easily his written words can be misconstrued as a harsh command. “I do not say this as a command, but I am testing the genuineness of your love against the earnestness of others” (verse 8). All the exchanges involved in giving—“from each according to their ability, to each according to their need,” or as others prefer, “The one who had much did not have too much, and the one who had little did not have too little”—are founded, surrounded, and bounded by the Glorious Exchange: “For you know the generous act of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for our sake he became poor, so that by his poverty we might become rich” (verse 9). As we seek and enjoy summertime relief from scheduled responsibilities and look forward to recreative rest and play, Paul’s “stewardship reminder” is appreciated. All contributions to the collection are so encouraging, and especially so as summertime relief! This is a special summer, though. Our “stewardship of the mysteries” (faith, preaching, learning, service, and the sacraments of love) extend beyond the weddings, baptisms, communion services, and loving care on Zion’s summertime planner. This year our “stewardship of the mysteries” extends to our social responsibilities to our neighbour during a pandemic. Generosity as patience, perseverance in social distancing, masking, and sanitizing, especially when we join in summer gatherings are just a few of the disciplines of the stewardship of life and health we still need to practice as vaccination continues. Christ has given us richly of these gifts of the Holy Spirit. Let us contribute them generously to the collective well-being wherever we are this summer, and enjoy a little “summertime relief!”

Almighty God our creator, you have brought us into this good land by your love and grace. Help us remember your generosity and do your will. Bless our land with honesty in the workplace, truth in reconciliation, and honour in daily life. Save us from violence, discord, and confusion; from pride and arrogance; and from every evil attack. When times are prosperous, let our hearts be thankful; and in troubled times, let our hearts trust in you. We pray in Jesus’ Name. Amen (Evangelical Lutheran Worship, p. 77).