

GOOD JOB, CHURCH!

2 Corinthians 8:7-15

June 28, 2015

First Christian Church

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⁷Now as you excel in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in utmost eagerness, and in our love for you*—so we want you to excel also in this generous undertaking.*⁸I do not say this as a command, but I am testing the genuineness of your love against the earnestness of others.

⁹For you know the generous act* of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich. ¹⁰And 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—¹¹now finish doing it, so that your eagerness may be matched by completing it according to your means. ¹²For if the eagerness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has—not according to what one does not have. ¹³I do not mean that there should be relief for others and pressure on you, but it is a question of a fair balance between ¹⁴your present abundance and their need, so that their abundance may be for your need, in order that there may be a fair balance. ¹⁵As it is written, ‘The one who had much did not have too much, and the one who had little did not have too little.’

Good morning! It is good to see you all this morning! Today is a big day in our church, our youth group is departing on their mission trip to Nashville, TN, and the church is having a fellowship dinner today after the 10:45 service as a commissioning for the youth, and their sponsors, as they depart on their mission trip to Nashville. I encourage as many of you as are able to attend this fellowship event in celebration! Meatloaf and banana pudding are phenomenal at this church, a good enough reason for fellowship alone! They are almost as good as spending time with the people that are the church! Most of you are aware that this is also my last day with you all as associate minister, and first and foremost, I say thank you all for everything, there is no way to recount the blessings this church has shared with me, in wisdom, experience and all manner of other things, and I can do nothing less than respond in great gratitude. Thank you all, sincerely. This meal is also a send-off for me as well. While my time with you all has ended, I must say that you all have been

a fantastic and amazing church to have served in my ministry, and you all should look forward to meeting and working with your new associate minister, Renee Hoke, as you are able in the coming days and years ahead.

Now, after having spent nearly one year serving you all in my ministry, I can also now why you are a fantastic church. For one, this church has a fantastic depth of understanding of the Christian faith, and can offer a full array of answers for why that matters in the world. From service to others, to developing strong and deep spirituality, to being good and careful stewards of the earth, to being loving toward others, to teaching and showing the acts of the faith to others, to caring for its own in all conditions, you all as a people that compose this church excel. Your elders meet weekly to pray and to serve one another and others in body and in spirit, your diaconate also serve in many forms of servant leadership. There are also many regular groups that meet to pray for so many pressing things, and there are several groups that meet regularly to serve both the local community and the broader world. This church also cares for its own by forging good fellowship, we need look no further than lunch to have a great opportunity to do this! What is more is that this church is a place where young Christians can grow deep roots for living out full and fruitful lives, one need look no further than the youth group, which will be traveling later today to serve others in a faraway place. While we may not see the benefits of their works in our own community, we have benefited in this community in the past from distant strangers, and it did us well, it is the least we can do to pass these favors forward when we can't pass it back. Only good things will come from service toward others such as this, and our youth will learn a little more about God's good creation and people through this trip as well. And how could our youth

not grow deep roots, there are so many great leaders, parents, and mentors here it is amazing. And these people, that is you all, are great story tellers, it is easy to see that this is a place that not only matters today, but it has mattered to so many for generations. As if this was not enough, this is a church that demonstrates great generosity in many things. From those who need temporary help to keep lights and water going, this church has reached out to keep families on the brink from going over the edge, and what is more, to help them to be able to manage their lives in sustainable ways, that honor the best wisdom that the faith has to offer. The generosity of this church has also provided help to those who are young and without coats, to keep them a little warmer so that they may focus on growing up, instead of searching for a little heat. And for those who are worried about systemic problems, this church has helped a great many through outreaches such as Common Ground Recovery Ministries, a place where all are welcome, even the easily angered, even the parents who have much to learn, even those who struggle with the demons of addiction, and this is a place that takes them just as they are, and will walk them to a place where they can stand on their own among their peers once again in fullness. And even when others are not in need, this church is a place that seeks to give gifts and blessings to others in good faith. I heard a story this week that for the church's 100th birthday party, a group of people in the church raised a great gift and give away on its birthday, and shared it with the other churches in our cluster. There is such a great legacy and story among you here, and I look forward, as you should too, to where you all will be called in this church in the future.

When this church finds its callings to be an agent of Christ in the world to be too great to do alone, this church gladly partners with so many organizations and other

churches and faith groups that your head will spin if you try to count them all. From Faith Mission to other ecumenical partnerships, this church does so much with what it has. One does not have to look hard to see where you all can say to your church, job well done. Now, returning to our passage for today, we hear a little snippet from Paul's second letter to the church in Corinth. Paul wrote this letter during his later travels throughout the ancient world to minister to the newborn and as of then still fledgling Christian faith, and he is responding to reports he has heard from others about the church in Corinth. Much of what Paul is saying, in this passage, is to reinforce and affirm the very best traits of this church in Corinth, and to encourage them to continue onward doing the work of Christ in the world. Paul knows this church well enough to say that they excel in doing the works of the faith, those acts that share the love of Christ with one another, in building good sound wisdom and knowledge of the Christian faith, and he also affirms the character of the church, its competitive spirit and eagerness in all things in its life. From this passage in this letter alone, we might be so bold as to imagine this church in Corinth being one that would have been an exciting place to be a member of in its time and place in history. Yet, Paul does have a goal in affirming the best in this church. He is encouraging them to know why they are doing what they are doing, not just doing what they are doing out of competition. Paul is encouraging them to demonstrate Christ like love, not just trying to outdo others in their actions of love. In the world Paul was in, his concern was to make the church a place that was more than just a civic organization, he is striving to keep it true to its original intent, to be a place to grow in depth of faith in Christ like ways, and to make that a beacon to the farthest corners of the world.

Now, this church, that is you all, in my opinion, have no problem what so ever in sincerity of your actions, I have seen so many of you pour out sweat, hours, time, joy, creativity, energy, and resources for the life of this church, and for that, while I still am your minister, on behalf of your church, I must say, well done church! But I encourage you to always seek and try new ways exercise this as a church, and to do this for even the least of those among you. Exercise love, that love of Christ, in ways that speak to all peoples in all places, and walk with them in seeking to do what needs done in the world. That love of Christ is a powerful thing, you all know this well, but it is something that crosses all boundaries, real or imagined, man-made or not, and seeks to see others first as blessed children of God, then seeks to bring out the best God placed in them. While this is one of the best churches to undertake this task that I have ever been a part of, it none-the-less is no small task. There will always be those who mean well in the world, but fall short of the best intentions, it happens to us all. There are also those who will get caught up in other agendas that happens to the best of us too, it is easy to lose sight of the goal sometimes. And the world will always place new and strange ethical questions before us that we never have imagined and sometimes the world will try to divide us all over these. I encourage to in all these times to adhere to the advice of one of my grandmotherly figures who would say, God is good, that's all you need to know. Her message was to keep it simple, stick to knowing God is good always, leave the big stuff in God's hands, and just keep on loving one another through the thick of it all. We are Christians, called to be in this world, but not of it, and you all are a fine community of Christians that compose this church. You all have such a broad array of gifts and talents to be the church, it is amazing. And more than these gifts, this is not a singular event or place you have arrived at today, there are many before you

that have left a superb legacy of faith for you all to follow in. Honor the best of where those who have gone before you by remembering not just the things they did, but the virtues and lessons they learned and passed on to you, and share those virtues and lessons through your actions and lives.

So, while I have said a lot here this morning, and before we join in some phenomenal fellowship (please join us) I will summarize my words with this. The church is you, the people, and to you all, I must say that you are a church that does so much to live the Christian faith in the world in ways that build the love, hope, joy and peace of Christ in the world, and not just for yourselves, but for all peoples. Good job church, keep it up!

Benediction

Go with the peace of the Lord, and take that peace with you in all the places you will go, and share that with all the people you will meet. Go knowing you are loved by God, and by one another. Amen.