

**Generous Love-Generous Lives**  
**Synod Assembly Weekend Sermon**  
**Bishop Jim Arends**  
April 26-28, 2013



Text: 2 Corinthians 7:16-8:9

Dear sisters and brothers in Christ, welcome to the 2013 La Crosse Area Synod Assembly. That's right, all who join in worship this weekend are a part of the assembly.

Our synod is made up of 38,000 baptized members in 74 congregations of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. Together this weekend we center on the theme: Generous Love-Generous Lives. Friday evening we gathered over 1000 of us, our neighbors, and our friends to hear the Reverend Rolf Jacobson challenge us to respond to the Generous Love of God revealed in Jesus by living out Generous Lives that follow Jesus. The voting members of our congregations have gathered this Saturday to elect leaders, adopt a budget, and to worship. This Saturday evening members of the synod celebrated 25 years of being united in ministry as the La Crosse Area Synod and as the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. Now we gather in our various congregations and worship our Generous God using a united liturgy and message.

Finally, this Assembly Sunday members of congregations will live out the Generous Love of God through community service projects. Christ's servants from Woodland Lutheran in Rome, Wisconsin, to Blackhammer Lutheran Church in Houston County, Minnesota, from St. John's in Alma to St. Peter's in Prairie du Chien, will lead nursing home worship services, celebrate neighborhood block parties, clean bike trails, raise funds to fight malaria, and more and more and more. Spread out through ten counties around La Crosse, we are united as the La Crosse Area Synod.

Thank you, for being an important part of the ministry we share.

Today's text is an opportunity to cut to the center of what we are about. It is a challenge to go from truth to action. It's interesting that as we have lived in this text for a year Paul's words to the Corinthians immediately following our text are, "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."

To finish something, we have to have something started. Paul is writing to the church in Corinth with a concern about one church and praise for another. His concern is the established ministry in Jerusalem. Its work is difficult and it has fallen on hard times financially. Paul has been making an appeal to the churches he has started, asking them to help the Jerusalem church.

The struggling church in Macedonia has responded. While they are a very young church with their own financial problems they have taken up an offering for the church in Jerusalem. While they have their own needs, they know they are part of a greater church. While they celebrate the progress in their own community, they are begging to be a part of the ministry in Jerusalem. Paul tells the story of the Macedonian's generosity to encourage the church in Corinth to join the greater ministry. He makes his case with three main points. Hear them in reverse order from the way Paul wrote them.

Central to his argument is the Gospel – the Good News – Jesus. Paul writes, "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." In essence, Jesus gave up all that was heavenly in order to be born a human, to preach and teach and heal, and then to die. He gave his whole life that we might know the richness of life in God's good grace. He gave that we might have confidence for each day, community for support, and heavenly hope. He gave it all and we are rich beyond what we can know. All from Christ's generous love.

In addition Paul lets the Corinthians see what happens when people live in this richness. While the Macedonians are not well off, they still want to respond to Jesus'

generosity with their own. They know of the good work that is being done in Jerusalem. They know it has value and they beg to be a part of it. Let me say that again, the poor Macedonians beg to be a part of the work in Jerusalem.

Finally, Paul begins his story with his conclusion. He knows the need God's people have to give in response to Christ's love. He knows a work of the church needs their help. He knows how the two must come together – God's generous love motivates us to leading generous lives. So Paul begins his account with a powerful pastoral word, "I have complete confidence in you."

Wouldn't it be wonderful if each of our pastors could regularly step in the pulpit, look out at their congregation, and proclaim, "I have complete confidence in you"?

In many ways, I have been spending this year in complete confidence in you as faithful people, in you as a congregation of Christ's great church, and in us as the La Crosse Area Synod. The needs in congregations and throughout the church are great. The ministries in the congregations and our ministry as a synod and as the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America are also great. God is doing exciting things in us, with us, and through us. Do you see God at work?

In our congregations the Gospel is faithfully preached by pastors and laity alike. Sunday school teachers and confirmation guides are connecting our children to the relevant story of Jesus and his love. Young people are heading off to college and seminary to prepare to be professional servants of Christ's church. Meals are being shared with the hungry and the lonely on a regular basis. Clothing is collected for our neighbors in need. Quilts and health kits and school kits are assembled in our congregations and sped to places of need around the globe. Ethiopian pastors and evangelists and parish coordinators that were taught by pastors of our synod are raising up leaders in their own land. The list goes on and on.

One of our assembly guests is Eliseo Mandamiendo. He is the president of the Peruvian Lutheran Evangelical Church. Because of him the Latin American Lutheran Bishops' Group has had to change their name. He is a lay person elected to head a national church body. He is a proud member of the newly renamed Latin American Lutheran Leaders Group.

President Eliseo tells the story of a church that is reaching out to the poorest of the poor, a church that provides safety and promise to single and battered mothers, a church that cares for children. He tells of congregations that have twenty people in church on Sunday morning yet feed and tutor fifty children each school day. He invites us to support this program called Sembrando. He invites us to share in the work Jesus is doing a continent away.

I have every confidence in Jesus. I know Jesus lives in us. I have every confidence that we as individuals and congregations will beg to share in this ministry – and in raising up leaders for the church – and in feeding and clothing our neighbors – and in proclaiming the good news of Jesus and his love.

May God open our eyes to see the Generous Love of Jesus in our lives. And may God open our hearts to respond with our Generous Lives.