

Generosity

A lesson from Where Lilacs Still Bloom by Jane Kirkpatrick

"...how, while passing through great trouble, their boundless joy even amid their deep poverty has overflowed to increase their generous liberality."

"The pressure triggered something totally unexpected: an outpouring of pure and generous gifts."

- 2 Corinthians 8:2 (NIV/The Message)

I confess, I'm rarely happy in a time of trial. Yet Paul writes of the church in the Macedonia province and how the people's true colors came through in their time of pressure and trouble. Instead of going inward, lamenting their sad state, they "pleaded for the privilege of helping out in the relief of poor Christians" *The Message* sings. Their joy even amid deep poverty overflowed to increase their generosity. How did they do that, how did they draw upon such a spirit that witnessed to their love of Jesus by giving more than they could even afford?

So many of the men and women who went before us, were pioneers in settling our country decades ago I think discovered that same quality of finding joy in trial, so much joy that it allowed them pass it on, to give generously even when they couldn't afford it. They built barns for neighbors, they raised up schools and churches out of their meager incomes. Today, in rural areas neighbors might make hay for a farmer who is ill burning their own fuel and time; and in urban centers a woman grocery shops and keeps a kitchen stocked for a friend weakened by chemotherapy treatments. These generous acts are not done in order to receive joy but because the people have a spirit of God they cannot help but share.

"Generosity," wrote the esteemed psychiatrist Karl Menninger, "Is the single most important indicator of a person's mental health. Generous people are rarely mentally ill."

I find those words encouraging not only as a mental health professional but especially today as a human being struggling with life's demands and seeing the witness of those who go before me, giving of themselves in joy.

Today especially Lord, help me be the generous person you have inspired in your people through the generations. Let me witness to others through my joy in giving of my time, my talents, my resources that are all gifts from you. Help me pass them on and share in more joy that comes when you grant the privilege of helping others. Amen.