

SEVEN WORDS - THANKS
A SERMON BASED ON 2 CORINTHIANS 9:6-15
PREACHED AT CHIPPAWA PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
NIAGARA FALLS, ONTARIO
SUNDAY, MARCH 24, 2019
10:00 a.m.

It was arguably one of the most brilliant ad campaigns ever created.

It did such a good job it is still a popular reference over 20 years later.

In 1996 Mastercard was just 'the other credit card',

the one not as useful,

and not as well accepted,

and really,

in many people's eyes,

just not necessary.

Sales were sliding.

Competition was pushing it to the edge of oblivion.

The McCann Erikson advertising agency was contracted

to create a campaign to revive the brand.

It was revealed in the 1997 World Series.

This first ad of their campaign featured
a father and son at a baseball game.
It has become so deeply rooted our culture now,
that we all instantly recognize the rhythm
and cadence.

Hot dogs - \$6.

Two tickets to the game - \$52

Real conversation with your eleven year old son? – Priceless.

There are some things money can't buy.

For everything else,
there's Mastercard.

It was an ad that so effectively captured the imagination
and heart of consumers,
that as well as winning countless awards
from the advertising industry,
that over two decades later we haven't forgotten them.

Parodies of its pattern,rhythm and message still get made.

Why was it so effective?

What captured us so quickly?

Some have said that in a materialistic culture,

in an environment where the message is buy, buy, buy.

Spend, consume, use,

The credit card has become 'the' symbol of decadence.

It has become a symbol of instant gratification.

It has become the label upon our out of control greed.

Mastercard didn't position itself against other credit cards.

Mastercard didn't say,

our credit card will be better than other credit cards.

Mastercard didn't say, you can use our card in more places,

or that it has a better interest rate

or anything like that.

Mastercard seemingly positioned itself

against money and consumerism itself,

‘There are some things money can’t buy.’

Mastercard, a credit card company of all things, pointed out,
that some things are priceless.

A relationship with your son was their first example.

If you go through their commercials,
you will see how they all communicate a value.

And so, while ironically trying to get you to raise your credit limit
and shop more,

Mastercard presented itself
not as a tool for greed,
but as a way to leverage your values.

A baseball game with your son – the relationship that happens there,
that is priceless.

Mastercard will make that happen.

It was and is an ad campaign
that captured where the audience’s heart was.

What was invaluable.

What was priceless.

There are some things money can't buy.

Mastercard and purchasing on credit

will make it a lot easier on your conscience

to spend what you don't have,

on the things that well, are worth it.

There are some things money can't buy.

We all know it.

But we forget.

We easily and repeatedly forget the lesson,

that the things money can't buy,

tend to be the more and even really, the most important things.

Our hearts are too easily caught up in self-absorption.

We stay worried about our own needs.

We obsess on what we don't have, or what we want next.

We too often miss what is right in front of us.

It is still one of my favourite interviews.

Sitting with a late night talk show host,

this guy nailed it.

He said we live in a time when everything's amazing,
and nobody's happy.

He said our attitude these days is terrible.

We have more than at any time in history,
and we complain.

He got talking about flying,
and he made me laugh out loud.

He said "a few years ago

I was on an airplane and there was internet,
high speed internet - on the airplane!

That was the newest thing that I knew existed.

And I'm sitting on the plane and they go

open up your laptop and you can go on the internet
and it was fast and I was watching YouTube clips.

It was amazing. I was in an airplane on the internet.

Then the internet broke down and they apologized.

It made sense to me, how on earth did it ever work in the first place?

The announcement came on

“Ladies and gentlemen, we apologize
the internet is not working.”

and the guy next to me went ‘pua this sucks!’

Like, how quickly the world owes him something
he knew existed only 10 seconds ago- and on planes!

The comedian went on.

“Flying is the worst one because people come back from flights

and they tell you their story and it's like a horror story.

They act like their flight was a cattle car in the 40's in Germany.

That's how bad they make it sound.

They're like - ‘it was the worst day of my life.

First of all we didn't board for 20 minutes

and then we get on the plane and they made us sit there

on the runway for 40 minutes. We had to sit there.’

And I can't help but ask,

‘Oh really, what happened next?’

Did you fly through the air incredibly like a bird?

Did you partake in the miracle of human flight, you whiner?

Wow, you're flying! It's amazing!

Everybody on every plane

should just constantly be going, oh wow, oh wow.

You're flying.

You're sitting in a chair in the sky.

A chair in the sky....

But it doesn't recline very far..."

We too often miss the wonders of what is right in front of us.

What is right in front of us,

is the wonder that is this life

which God has given us and the countless wonders life holds.

Caught into a spiral of self-absorption and selfishness,

of greed and materialistic expectation, of worry and anxiety,

we miss all of what is right in front of us.

From the feeling of the sun on our face and breath in our lungs,

to the voice of a friend on the phone,

or the taste of a favourite food.

The apostle Paul had an antidote to this chronic condition.

The apostle Paul encouraged the Corinthian church to give.

He encouraged the church to give,

not only to bless those in need,

but even more, to bring healing to souls that need to learn

and be cured by having

a posture of wonder and gratitude.

Paul reminded them, and because we're the church,

he's reminding us too,

that God has shown us surpassing grace.

How much has come to you

for which you can take no credit?

How much of spring's beauty will you put together?

Forsythia? Did you decide it would be yellow?

Crocuses.

Did you decide those would come up not long after the snow goes?

But you get to enjoy them none the less.

Coffee?

Did you come up with those? Did you create coffee beans?

Yet there is this awesomeness for you.

What about kids in your life?

In the past year and a bit

little Hazel and Emerson and Carter have shown up in our church family.

They just simply didn't exist before.

I am still amazed at the two who just showed up

in the lives of Wendy and I.

We provided some genetic code, but still. Wow.

It's a wonder.

What about the fact that you are here to witness life at all?

Do you ever pause to look up at the moon or the stars?

Or catch a glimpse of a deer in the woods?

Life is abundantly rich.

God shares life freely.

Life is a surpassing grace God has given you.

Freely, without cost.

It is priceless.

Not only that,

in the mess that we can make of it,
hurting others, being hurt, turning to darkness,
anger, greed, anxiety and selfishness,

God still gives.

He doesn't withhold himself the way we would
and do if we feel unappreciated.

God continues to give.

For God so loved the world he gave his only begotten son,
that whoever trusts in him should not perish,
but have eternal life. Life. Life to the full.

We can be given eternal life,
just for being in a posture to receive it.

A chair in the sky.

But we complain about the 40 minutes on the runway.

This life is a wondrous gift.

Even when it is tough, if we look, there is grace.

I read someone's story a while back

and she made me smile because - she saw it.

She saw the surpassing grace God had given her.

Saw it right in the middle of a situation

she initially never would have seen as a gift.

At the age of 43, already having four children,

at a time when there was a ton of stuff going on in her life,

she learned she was pregnant.

She said, "I found out that I was pregnant.

And here I was no spring chicken, you know?

So, that was kind of another

earth-shattering experience to go through, all in one year.

And I'm thinking "dang it"

I didn't know what to think, it was surreal.

But I'm thinking I'm 43 years old,

I knew the criticism would come but I knew I could handle that.

Five kids, right on, the more the merrier.

My husband and I love kids.

Well, about 12 weeks along in the pregnancy,
when he was away for work,
I went to the doctor and she said,
“Well, we’ve got some test results for you
and you need to sit down and just be prepared.”

I thought, I’ve never been sick a day in my life,
everything’s going to be fine.

And she told me the baby’s going to be born with Down syndrome.

So that’s another thing that just sort of, wow,
shattered my world for a minute,
because I was scared to death.

I said “Wait a minute God, I didn’t order this.”

How in the world am I going to handle this?

Never in my wildest dreams would I have thought
we would be in that situation.

My sister has a child with autism and one of my thoughts was,

“God, my sister is the one who is compassionate

and she has more time

and she's kind of wired to deal with a child with special needs.

I don't think I am.

And unless you change my heart, God,

I don't think I'm going to be able to handle this one."

She said,

"I had to hold onto the faith that I had always talked about

and thought I believed in,

that God wouldn't give us something we couldn't handle.

When my husband came home, I said, 'Aren't you thinking 'Why us?'

He said "Why not us?"

And that shifted perspective right off the bat too,

again thinking we are privileged and we are blessed.

But it took me many, many months

before thinking that things would be okay with our son

being born with Down syndrome.

My son was born 5 weeks early.

He changed my world.

He's got this heart of gold.

Here is the lesson that I learned from him,
besides being more compassionate
and really wanting to reach out
and help those who have challenges
and maybe are less privileged or have less ability than others.

But this is the lesson we all can learn from him.

And I do know that he'll be teaching us
more than we're ever going to be able to teach him.

The thing he teaches us,
he wakes up in the morning,
he kind of looks around and rubs his sleepy little eyes,
and he starts applauding.

He applauds the day.

And I think "Oh my goodness,
we should all have that perspective."

So I watch this little boy and I learn so much from him:

he applauds the day!

Paul said it in this letter.

Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift.

Appreciate. Applaud. Say thanks.

In a world that tells you that you have to acquire to be happy,

that you have to acquire to be fulfilled,

that you have to acquire to build a life,

and that it all has to be on your terms,

In a world that tries to manipulate us into using credit

to acquire what is supposed to be priceless

Scripture pushes back.

There are some things money can't buy.

A rich life is one of them.

Paul turns our story of life on its head.

Whoever sows sparingly will reap sparingly.

If you are all about collecting it all up,

you will not experience a harvest.

If you are worried, “Will there be enough for me?”

Paul reminds us - God. God gives. God shares. God is life.

God is able to make all grace abound to you.

So that in all things,

at all times,

having all that you need,

you will abound in every good work.

You will abound.

Your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God.

Your generosity will show you the chair in the sky.

Life is rich.

Living is rich.

Life and living find their source in God.

God - who gives.

God - who shares.

God who, in wanting us to live says,

it's not about collecting, and hoarding,

it's about giving.

And in cheerful giving, there is appreciation

there is applause, and there is thanks.

That is what is priceless.

The one who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food
will also supply and increase your store of seed
and will enlarge the harvest of your righteousness.

You will be made rich in every way
so that you can be generous on every occasion,
made rich - so you can be generous
and your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God,
applause for God.

This service that you perform, generosity, giving with a cheerful heart,
is not only supplying the needs of God's people
but is also overflowing in many expressions of thanks to God.
Every day can start with applause and appreciation.
Every day can start with thanks.

Because of the service by which you have proved yourselves,
people will praise God for the obedience
that accompanies your confession of the gospel of Christ,
and for your generosity in sharing with them

and with everyone else.

Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift.

Life is full of the richness of God.

Life is a chair in the sky.

God shares it freely.

A life is built, not when we gather up stuff with our credit cards,

life comes when, grateful, appreciative, we share.

Life overflows when we express our thanks to God.

Gratitude, saying thanks, opens us and releases us to share,

because we can see the abundance of goodness.

It is why we worship.

Here in worship is where we awake to the day,

awake to the goodness, priceless gift of God in our lives,

and we applaud.

There are some things money can't buy.

The grace and love of God,

shared freely with us,
shared in all of creation,
shared in Jesus Christ is priceless.

Share it freely with others,
it will leave you and others
worshipping God and applauding.
That, is true living.
That is truly priceless.
Say thanks.

Amen.