

REDISCOVER MACEDONIA

A spirit of gratitude and generosity



Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
God's work. Our hands.

Bible Study #3 – Share

By Rev. Serena Sellers

Beg for the privilege to share ... complete involvement

*“For, as I can testify, they voluntarily gave according to their means, and even beyond their means, **begging us earnestly for the privilege of sharing in this ministry to the saints...**”*

My son was preparing to enter his last year of college. I knew that I wanted to recognize his graduation with a gift, but I had no idea what he would want, or expect, at this milestone. I wanted to participate in his celebration in a significant way. It was important to me to feel that I was helping launch him into his future.

Matt is not very materialistic, but I knew that some of his classmates would be receiving an automobile, or other pricey item. If what he needed was going to be costly, I thought it would be important to have some time to arrange my finances. So I asked him as he finished his junior year. “What do you want for your graduation present?”

At first he couldn't think of anything that he needed, but finally he agreed to think it over. About a week later he called me with excitement reverberating through the telephone line. His request was entirely unexpected. “I want you to climb Mt. Kilimanjaro with me!” He not only wanted a life changing adventure, he wanted me to be part of it.

He wasn't simply asking for a financial commitment. He wanted my time, talent *and* treasure. I was going to have to buy tickets to Tanzania and equipment, but I was also going to have to research the trip, train my out of shape physique for an entire year to get into condition to climb a mountain, learn some Swahili, overcome my fear of traveling so far from home to a place where I knew no one to do something I had never done before... He was not asking me to write a check. He was asking for complete involvement!

I was overwhelmed by his request, but I was also profoundly honored. I said, “Yes!”

Have you ever said “Yes!” to something that demanded your full attention and involvement? When have you faced a challenge that required your full commitment, body, mind and spirit? (Pause to share stories!)

When the Macedonian Christians heard about Paul's collection they didn't just want to "support" God's mission in the world. They were excited to be a part of it. Their gift was not "a charitable donation" but a commitment to accompany others in the church in a real and tangible way.

They knew that it would be impractical and inefficient to pack up and travel with Paul to take part in the mission in Jerusalem, but they recognized that their offerings were a kind of "potential energy" that could allow them to do exactly that. Currency is not just metal, (or in our day, paper, or numbers on a screen), it is the symbol we trade for our time, skill and labor. The energy of the Macedonians, their hard work, their zeal for the gospel, **could** travel with Paul to Jerusalem and transform the ministry there, in the guise of their monetary offering.

The Macedonians were thrilled by the opportunity to enter a partnership with God and with those who would be served by their offerings. They recognized that their participation made them a significant part of something greater than themselves.

Their enthusiastic response was like the child who says, "I want to help!" By being involved in the offering they were expressing their deep desire to be an active part of the Body of Christ, not just recipients of, or spectators to, Christ's saving work in the world.

Have you ever been part of a group that was doing something significant?

Do you feel like you are actually involved in God's saving work in the world, or have you seen yourself more as a recipient or spectator?

Do you see your offerings as a way to be involved in God's work in a real and tangible way?

Did you ever feel like you gave yourself to God when you participated in an offering?

(Pause to share stories!)

God chose total involvement in the world by breaking into his creation in the person of Jesus. Jesus was the Kingdom of God incarnate. God didn't want to stand apart from his creation, but longed to accompany his people, and love them into the unity of common purpose with their creator.

"For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life." John 3:16

Christ gave everything in order to redeem us so that all may be one. It is the generosity of Jesus on the cross that brings in the Kingdom to us. Wherever Paul went, he preached the message of Christ's sacrifice.

"When I came to you, brothers and sisters, I did not come proclaiming the mystery of God to you in lofty words or wisdom. For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and him crucified". I Corinthians 2:1-2

Paul's message of the generosity of Jesus on the cross inspired the Macedonians to commit themselves completely to a common purpose with the whole church. It is the reason they wanted to be involved, and gave themselves to the work of the church through their offering.

How do you feel about the idea that you have been made worthy of God's total involvement by the cross?

Has your gratitude inspired you to be involved with those whom Jesus called the church to serve: the last, the least and the lost?

My son didn't want some "thing" that I could give him. He wanted me! Our time striving together toward a common goal, and our moment at the "top of Africa" on the peak of Kilimanjaro was worth more than any gift I could imagine. It was a gift that affirmed our relationship. It was a gift I could not wait to give.

God, wanted the Macedonians too, and God wants us, not just our money, but much more: our total involvement! The Macedonians responded with a resounding, "Yes!"

Let us pray,

Lord God, on the cross you showed that you were willing to go anywhere and do anything to get involved in our lives. Give us eyes to see and ears to hear, so that we will be honored to say "Yes!" to your call to get involved in the adventure of your mission to the world!