

- **How I got here?** I was invited. I was introduced. [In our outreach as a church we need to remember how *personal* this all is and how we have connected and strive to continue to be connected.]

I'm a transplant from Church of the Advent (as a number of us are now that Advent has been closed) **John 15:2** ("I am the vine, you are the branches.")

I was received decades ago by Bshp. Persell.

- **As important is why we stay:** the people of the church and church family. The dedication to scripture, community and growth in Christ. We are also not only a **comfort** to one another, but are "**sand paper**" to one another.

[I will be "quoting a few scriptures" - because I'm a lawyer, and lawyers always like to have authority for what they say].

Proverbs 27:17

"Iron sharpeneth iron; so a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend."

King James Version (KJV)

We need one another to challenge and correct one another. In this regard, we need to pray for humility (less pride). We need to remember the proverbial log in the eye. And do something about it. Remember Jesus's challenge to the group who were going to stone the woman accused: "let he who is without sin, throw the first stone." **John 8:7**

No one is invulnerable to sin - or missing the mark. But each of us always has the opportunity of making things better - in thought, word and deed, through prayer and service.

- **Giving - and giving to the church - is a spiritually healthy act and celebration.**

King James Bible - 2 COR 9:7

Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver.

Proverbs 11:25

A generous soul will prosper, and he who refreshes others will himself be refreshed.

Romans 12:8

if it is encouraging, let him encourage; if it is giving, let him give generously; if it is leading, let him lead with diligence; if it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully.

Philemon 1:14

But I did not want to do anything without your consent, so that your goodness will not be out of compulsion, but by your own free will.

- **Giving is a celebration of thankfulness** - [so could there be a more appropriate time of year than “Thanksgiving” - the harvest, Sukkot, “Chuseok”, etc.]
[<https://www.travelchannel.com/interests/holiday/photos/giving-thanks-around-the-world>]

thankfulness to God for what He hath given; our thankfulness and rejoicing in the abundance of what we have - no matter how much or how little; thankfulness for the church, that like our Lord it stands like one of those pillars in our lives, there every Sunday - and there through its Pastor and people throughout the week.

I recently had the opportunity of experiencing the care and attention of our church in a special way. I lost my father on the last day of June and we buried him on July 14th. Not only did I receive warm and gracious attention from my fellow parishioners, but I was also greatly comforted and impressed that several of our church family showed up 50 miles north to be there at my father’s wake and the next day others at my father’s funeral and memorial luncheon. Several of you at the church aided me in choosing the hymns and scriptures to be read, which ended up indirectly aiding me in a segment of the eulogy.

Still others aided in providing beautiful music at both the wake and church service.

Others have come forward to help in other ways. I am very grateful. We are in these ways reminded to be there for others, too, when and as we can.

I am very personally grateful for this outpouring of Grace and friendship, which speaks very highly for the Ascension community. I have no doubt that if we practice this in our lives together, our Faith - **as our church** - shall continue to be strengthened and to grow.

- **We should aim to give sacrificially.** What I understand this to mean is that we should give enough to **feel it** proportionate to our means. Our giving to the church should be meaningful and purposeful. It should reflect and be part of our thankfulness. It should be part of our celebration of our lives in the Lord.

This reminds me of the concept of “stretch” - which I came in contact with, of all places, through McDonald’s corporation (when as a client, I did their worldwide immigration for all inbound employees). “Stretch” is their highest performance level that can be achieved there. Like going the “extra mile”. That is what I think we should do - when we give sacrificially - we should “stretch”.

Today’s Gospel (**Mark 12:38-44**) and Pastor Raymond’s Sermon remind us that

sacrificial giving is relative and proportional. One man's ceiling is another man's floor (Paul Simon) - for me sized up by "stretch".

We should "stretch" joyfully and sacrificially in our giving.

- **There are also seasons of giving: [to everything there is a season]**

We may give more when we come into a windfall or have a good year.

We may give less when trouble besets us or receivables are delayed.

We may give more when there are special reasons for celebration!

There is also giving in kind - service to the church - we could not be who we are or where we are without this giving, too!

- **Refresh and bless**

So let us be refreshed and blessed, keeping in mind **Proverbs 11:25**:

"A generous soul will prosper, and he who refreshes others himself will be refreshed."

So let's get out there and stretch and do lots of refreshing - and give generously!

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Other “giving” scriptures:

Exodus 25:2

"Tell the Israelites to bring Me an offering. You are to receive My offering from every man whose heart compels him.

Deuteronomy 15:10

Give generously to him, and do not let your heart be grieved when you do so. And because of this the LORD your God will bless you in all your work and in everything to which you put your hand.

1 Chronicles 29:9

Then the people rejoiced at the willing response of their leaders, for they had given to the LORD freely and wholeheartedly. And King David also rejoiced greatly.

1 Chronicles 29:17

I know, my God, that You test the heart and delight in uprightness. All these things I have given willingly and with an upright heart, and now I have seen Your people who are present here giving joyfully and willingly to You.

2 Corinthians 8:12

For if there be first a willing mind, it is accepted according to that a man hath, and not according to that he hath not.

Exodus 25:2

Speak unto the children of Israel, that they bring me an offering: of every man that giveth it willingly with his heart ye shall take my offering.

Exodus 35:5

Take ye from among you an offering unto the LORD: whosoever is of a willing heart, let him bring it, an offering of the LORD; gold, and silver, and brass...