

Thanks-giving message (Ephesians 5: 18b-20, 2 Corinthian 9: 6-15 )

Thank you Judy and Tim for sharing your story of thankfulness for Asbury UMC. Throughout this month, we have been doing a gratitude-practice. As you can see on your left, the gratitude tree holds more and more fruits and leaves. On each fruit and leaf, we have written what we are thankful for. I bet you have found more blessings than you expected as you have paused for a moment to intentionally look for God's blessings in your daily lives. I asked two Zion Korean members to share what they are grateful for in 5 minutes as we did this morning. When they first heard of my request, they worried that their testimony of gratitude would be too short. But a week later, one person told me that "as he looked for blessings he had received, he realized that God abundantly blessed him so now he is struggling with what to share in 5 minutes. While we often miss God's blessings, there are so many things to give thanks to God for.

Apostle Paul said, "giving thanks to God the Father at all times and for everything in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ." We all know we have to give thanks to God at all times but we are not able to do it if we think of gratitude only as our emotion of thankfulness. Gratitude is not only our emotion, but also a virtue that we need to nurture. A Greek philosopher said, "A thankful heart is not only the greatest virtue, but the parent of all the other virtues." We need to practice gratitude every day in order to have more grateful hearts.

Can you separate iron filings from sand with your hands? I suppose you could if you are extremely patient and extremely skillful and had plenty of time, [PPT 1] but the easiest way to separate iron filings from sand is putting a magnet in the sand and the iron filings will be attracted to the magnet. Gratitude is like a magnet. If we have a grateful heart, we will be able to discern God's abundant love and grace that fills our lives and we can give thanks at all times.

Two weeks ago, my wife played her violin at Donald Kennedy's memorial service. After the service, a lady asked me, "pastor, do you also have musical talent like your wife has?" and of course, I don't, as you all know. So I answered, "No. God didn't give me musical talent but God surely gave me a gift in having a person with such musical talent as my wife." I know that God didn't give me musical gifts. But I don't have to complain about it because I have Nancy as my music director. God didn't give me artistic talents but I don't have to complain about it because I have wonderful chancel guild members who have a much better sense of beauty and skill to decorate our alter and sanctuary. All I need to do is politely asking them for help. I am not good at math and numbers but I don't have to complain about it because I have an excellent finance committee. And the committee chair and members have voluntarily agreed to serve one

more year. And I am grateful for that. (Perhaps, God gives me a gift of delegating works to people!)

We don't have to complain about what we don't have. Rather, we just need love that enables us to care for each other and cover the weaknesses of one another just like a healthy family does. My gift can be yours and your gifts can be mine when we share them with one another in love. This is actually what we are doing in the church. And I am grateful for that.

What are we grateful for? I am grateful for our caring and loving Asbury community. Your generous gifts of time, talents and money to the church help Asbury to carry out our mission to serve our neighbors and work for justice in the world. Our gifts make our Asbury the channel of God's abundant blessings.

Some of you may feel that you have little to offer to God but my friends, our God can create an abundance from our small gifts. So the amount doesn't matter. [ppt 2] Have you seen or used an old water-pump like this? Such a pump is connected with a wellspring, which does not dry out even in times of drought. To draw water from the well, a small bowl of water is needed to prime the pump. Our small gifts to the church... our small acts of serving our community can be the priming-water that connects people with Jesus Christ, who is the life-giving water, that never goes dry. We may not be able to quench the thirst of all people in need but our Christ can. Our acts of generosity to the church and our neighbor are the bowl of priming-water.

During this season of thanksgiving, be thankful for what God has given us, and generously and gratefully share it with our neighbors in need and our beloved Asbury. May God continue to bless you and your family abundantly as we continue to share God's blessing with our neighbors generously. Amen.