

A communion meditation delivered by The Rev. Timothy C. Ahrens, Sr. Minister, the First Congregational Church, United Church of Christ, Columbus, Ohio, November 3, 2013, All Saints Day, dedicated to the 13 members of First Church who passed to eternal life this past year and to all who buried their loved ones in our congregation as well and always to the glory of God!

“Always Give Thanks!”
II Thessalonians 1:1-4, 11-12;
Luke 19:1-10

Let us pray: May the words of my mouth and the meditations of each one of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our rock and our salvation. Amen.

You and I measure things every day – all day long. We use the word “measure” as a noun, a verb and an adjective. As a noun, we “measure” as a plan of action, a standard unit to express size, amount or degree. It is a quantity – a rhythm of a piece of poetry or music.

As a “verb”, the Oxford Dictionary says we measure to ascertain the size, amount, or degree of something. As an “adjective,” we “measure” to assess the importance, effect, or value of something or someone. We **measure someone/thing against** someone or something else. We judge someone or something by comparison with a certain standard. Did someone reach a certain goal or expected standard – did they measure up? (We do that a lot with grades in school). We also “**measure someone up**” scrutinizing them in order to form our assessment of them.

We measure height and miles; music and poetry; standards and grades; polls and people - all day long. We measure life – our lives and the lives of others. Speaking of measuring lives, T.S. Eliot wrote, “*I have measured out my life with coffee spoons.*”

But, how do we really measure a man or a woman? Luke's Gospel measures Zacchaeus as a "little" man. Besides being short, Zacchaeus had severely taken advantage of the people around him. As a tax collector, he was exacting and unforgiving in collecting what was owed him – gouging the poor in unrelenting ways. He was "little" man - inside and out.

Luke 19 tells us he climbed a tree to see Jesus. Who knows, he may have been getting out of the way of the crowds he had abused through his relentless tax collecting measures. Jesus spotted the little man up a tree. He called him out of the tree and ended up going to his house for a meal (an unpopular action by any measure). It must have been a great dinner party because in the end, Zacchaeus turned his life around – giving back half of all his possessions to the poor (read just about everyone in the region!) and granting four times that amount to anyone he had defrauded. He turned his life around by all measures! On that day, this man was measured in new and rewarding ways. He was headed to heaven on the nonstop train from hell!

Today, we are called up to measure two things: first, the saints of God in this congregation and in our lives who passed to eternal life AND second, how we step up and are counted as great stewards for God in Christ.

On the surface, these two measurements might not seem to fit together. There is the measure of a life on the one hand and the measure of a great stewardship commitment on the other hand. But, I believe they fit together well. I say that because the 13 men and women who died in the life of our congregation this past year were great givers. They gave their time, talents, and treasures to this congregation and this world. As such, they gave themselves to Christ.

Their names were **Ed Waller, Christopher Mondiek, Nancy Hadley, Lee Burba, Ruth Reeves, Bill Kutschbach, Dorothy Ringer, Mary (Polly) Devenish, Joe Glick, John Zahn, Ardis Postle, David Knox and Barbara Reed.** All 13 died in an eight month period – between early December and the end of July. By all

measures, they were all amazing human beings and dedicated followers of Jesus Christ.

In his book, The Measure of a Man, The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. wrote: *“The ultimate measure of a man is not where he stands in moments of comfort and convenience, but where he stands at times of challenge and controversy.”* How true! It was true Christ and the little man of Galilee – Zacchaeus. Each ended up giving all they had for all around them. But, also this true for each of our saints of God who have gone before us to heaven this year and we stand face-to-face with this truth today as well.

I witnessed the measures of living and giving in Ed, Christopher, Nancy, Lee, Ruth, Bill, Dorothy, Mary, Joe, John, Ardis, David and Barbara. In each of their lives, there were stories which connected with ours and brought out the best in us. As family, friends and church family we can hear their voices speaking to us and laughter surrounding us still. We can see their smiles and impish grins. We can feel their embrace and warmth of spirit. We can taste and smell the goodness of their cooking and baking (and in some cases the experimental nature of both!). Our senses are filled with them. They have not left us alone. We are still seeking to measure up to their fullness of life, their goodness, their love.

I am reminded by Ed Cole, founder of the Christian Men’s Network that *“The degree of loving is measured by the degree of giving.”* In that measure, the men and women we lift up in love today were all givers! Every one of them was a great giver! They were great stewards for God. They were stewards for others. They lived life to the fullest. They were gifts of God – beyond measure. We are called to be great givers in their memory and to honor their legacies of love.