

When I was asked to share with you why I give financial support to my church, old south, I had to stop and think. Giving to the church is such an automatic impulse for me, that I don't really think about it in the sense of that word. I was brought up to give to the church. I was taught to give by my parents who were taught by their parents. I grew up in a church where you paid what was called Church Dues as well as every Sunday when the offering basket was passed. My childhood memory is that basket being filled with copper and silver more so than greenbacks. The prayer that always kept company with that hand by hand passing of that basket of offerings was the prayer that blessed those who gave as well as those who had the desire to give. If, on occasion, I gave a whole big dollar, I first had to undo it from the knot my mother had tied at the end of a handkerchief. All so I wouldn't lose it.

So when asked to share why I give, I did what I always do with my important questions. I asked my family. My brothers, sisters and cousins. We were already in beginning stages of planning our Thanksgiving gathering for this year because the first cousins wanted to get together in New Orleans during the gumbo festival.... so the distribution list for my question was already in place.

I'll gladly tell you that faith carries weight in my family. We're in it together. I asked everybody..... "why do you give to the church?" The answers came quickly.

“I give with the specific intent that my giving brings glory to the name of my Father in Heaven”

“I give so that when others are blessed, they realize that God hears and answers”

“I give in obedience to the Father”.

“I give because God said to give and when I give it warms my heart and gives me joy knowing that the Lord has blessed me and I believe that HE would want me to share the love and be a blessing.”

“Another reason I give is so the person of God (that is to say the church leader) will have their needs are met and so that he or she can concentrate on the things of God”.

“I give because throughout the Bible, God teaches us to give. Not grudgingly but cheerfully, knowing that as much as I do give, I can't beat what God has given me... His Son, Jesus Christ, our Savior. His Life in place of ours”.

And the last quote I chose to include here says “I give my money out of obedience to the Word. Malachi 3:10. I give my time out of commitment to the faith.

Matthew 28: 19-20. I give my service to others out of my love for God. Matthew 22: 39. Stewardship involves all that God has given us and how we give back for His glory.”

In these responses you can hear the relationship each has with God...with His Son.

You can hear replies that repeat what scripture says. You see, we were taught that scripture is the lightning and the church its thunder. Yeah, we were taught in church to think like that. In the replies I read you can hear joy that connects us to hymns we sing. I grew up in a singing tradition where we jumped and clapped until we were spent. It's like when I'm sitting in my pew during 11:00 service here and I imagine God leaning forward as the choir sings and I say to myself (with God as my audience) "Look at us celebrating you. Worshiping you. Are you not pleased"

I give to the church because the church is the incubator for my faith. You can hear that too in the replies of my family. We go through our ups and downs together.

We mourn in faith. We fear and worry in faith. We fight the odds in faith. Church taught us how to do that. Our faith, honed by messages from family, friends, pastors...tells us that when we love, then God loves. That we can look and see people who may be physically unsheltered, but never spiritually so. When we work, then God works. What was imparted to us was that the church is the new body of the resurrected Christ. We were always taught that God is active and has agency in our lives and in the world. We go to Him when we're in a tight spot. And we were taught that His response is always "I'll be there directly".

I was also taught that the people of faith, are his hands, feet, heart, mind....well, you get it. You see, I give, because I see the church as the Good Samaritan. We give aid.... and we pay the bill. When we act. God acts.

As an adult, I like the way church formed the core of how, as children, we were taught to behave. Be respectful. Particularly of our elders. "God don't like ugly" we were told, when it came to bad behavior. My parents did not hesitate to use the proverbial rod. Needless to say, as a child... that was not my favorite parental response to my own bad behavior. I remember one time, it was an occasion for the use of the rod, and for some reason, that particular time... I took off running. Well, I did that once. And only once. Because I found out...Mama could run. Never did it again. I mix that memory with Mama unabashedly on her knees praying out loud and thanking God for her children. There is nothing more powerful than hearing love and seeing love portrayed in that way. For me the church gave me that portrait of how a parent loves.

One of the generalizations about black people is that we are church people. That generalization I proudly accept. For black people, faith is very public. There's nothing private about it. We make no apologies. I believe the church is at our core because we needed a warrior King. Jesus was and is that for us.

Dr. Martin Luther King personifies that. If anybody was a disciple of Christ, it was that man. For black people Dr. King languaged what we always crave. Heaven on earth. In that regard, as a people, we see our discipleship as a form of nation building. The church from that perspective builds the nation of the beloved community. And our faith, as a people, is not camouflaged by reality. No matter what is happening around us.... We see through. I absolutely love being black. It's because as people we were made for the question mark. Not the period. That's what keeps us moving. I remember mourning my mother. How we prayed for her life. She died. At the time of her death, I was not feeling inspired by faith. And during my intense arguments with God as I went through, in my spirit, I was posed a question that I remember to this day. When you pray, Deb, do you pray thy will be done or your will be done?

In that regard, when comes to the deep and stirring questions, I'm a learning disciple.

While I'm on the subject, I think one of the things that Dr. King pointed out during his time.... is slowly changing. The homogenous congregation based in ethnicity is changing bit by bit. The black church. The white church.

I'll share a story. I'm always in conversation with people about faith. Those conversations always lead to "where do you go to church?" when I reply, "I go to

Old South”. Its not uncommon for people to look puzzled and say “Where’s that?”. They look puzzled because they’re trying to figure out why they don’t know about the black church called Old South. I say, “It’s in Copley Square across from Boston Public Library.”

The push back is, “you mean that white church where rich people go?” I still use today the same response I used when I had that conversation the first time.

I say, “Well, you know, socioeconomic status is a form of class. It’s also a quality of character. So yes, you’ll find a lot of class at Old South church”.

I need to also start adding to that response that “qqqqqqqqqqqqqqqqqqqqqqyes, we may be doctors, nurses, journalists, techies, lawyers and such, but we’re also vendors of Spare Change, we also live on fixed incomes, and we also care about the quality of life being lived by others.

I give to this church because I’m proud of it. I’m proud of you.

I love Rumi the Persian poet who lived during the 13th century. There’s a line in one poem about the deep and passionate and overwhelming love someone has for someone else. The lover says to the loved “I see my beauty in you”.

I’ll take that line and adapt to my own sense of love and why I give to this body of Christ. “I see my faith in you.” Yes, I see my faith in you”.

