Stewardship by the Lectionary

*The Bible has plenty to say on stewardship. Enough, in fact, for stewardship-themed lessons every week based on readings from the lectionary. The following lessons tied to Year C of the three-year series can be incorporated into sermons, bulletin inserts, newsletters, prayers, or devotions. Each year a lesson is written for a different reading. All lessons available so far are included for each week.*

**Christmas 2**

Genesis 17:1-7

Thanks to the working of the Holy Spirit we are among the nations of believers of which Abraham is the father. We are keepers of the covenant the Lord established between Abraham and his descendants. As we experience the afterglow of Christmas we continue to rejoice that the Lord kept his promise to Abraham and Abraham’s spiritual descendants, which include us. Thanks to offerings motivated by the love of Christ and faith in this promise, the Christian church continues to proclaim to many nations the good news that the promise of a Savior has been fulfilled. May our offerings reveal our thankfulness to God for keeping his word.

Luke 1:68-75

With Christmas past, all that’s left is the cleanup and the thank yous. Moms will be nagging their children to write grandma and grandpa a thank you for the Christmas gifts they received. In Christmas we receive the greatest gift of all, a Savior from sin. Now it’s time for our thank you to him. In this song, Zechariah rejoiced because of the great gift of redemption and salvation that God was giving the world. He shows us how to say thank you—by serving God without fear in holiness and righteousness. Let us express our thanks for God’s Christmas gift to us by serving him with our time, our resources, and our lives.

**Epiphany**

Isaiah 60:1-6

In the Eastern Church the festival of the Epiphany of our Lord is the big celebration, not Christmas. Isaiah uses beautiful picture language to show us why this festival is so important. He foretold that the Savior would not just be for the people of Israel, but for the whole world. That includes you and me. That good news of a Savior guides and directs everything that we do.

Ephesians 3:2-12

Most of us are among the Gentiles to whom Paul is speaking in Ephesians. We too are “sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus.”We too believe in this mystery of God’s Son becoming a man. We know that, thanks to Jesus, we can approach our God with freedom and confidence. We praise the Lord for bringing us into his church. We thank the Lord with our offerings of time, talents, and treasure for compelling us to believe in the Epiphany of our Lord.

Matthew 2:1-12

Guided by God’s Word and led by a star, Magi came to worship the child Jesus, the King of the Jews. What a contrast we see: Jerusalem in great fear, the Magi returning home with great joy. The difference is grace. By grace the Magi believed God’s Word and that faith moved them to seek out the child and worship him with gifts. Grace makes the difference in our lives, too. Without God’s grace, we live in fear of the future. With God’s grace, we have the joy of salvation. May that faith move us to seek Christ in the Word and to worship him with our gifts of love.

**Baptism of Our Lord**

1 Samuel 16:1-13

When Samuel anointed David to be the future king of Israel, the Holy Spirit came on him in power. We know what David was able to accomplish as the Lord’s anointed. Jesus was anointed with the Holy Spirit at his baptism to carry out the plan of our salvation. He is both King and Priest who offered himself as the sacrifice for sin and now rules all things for his church. We have been anointed in our baptism, too, to be *royal priests* (1 Peter 2:9) whose purpose is to declare the praises of him who called us into his wonderful light. Let us use our resources of time and treasure to be the royal priests God has called us to be.

Titus 3:4-7

Strictly speaking, our Savior did not need to be baptized. He had no sins that needed to be forgiven. We, on the other hand, desperately need baptism. Paul’s words crush our sinful pride that tries to take at least partial credit for our salvation. At the same time his words comfort us that God, in mercy, gave us what we could never earn or deserve. Through something seemingly so simple as water applied in the name of the Triune God, God’s “not guilty” verdict becomes our own. Now we have a wonderful inheritance: heaven!

Luke 3:15-17, 21-22

The people of Jesus’ day were anxiously waiting for the Messiah to come. John the Baptist’s mission in life was to be Jesus’ advance man. John made it very clear that the time for the Messiah to arrive was at hand. It soon would become clear who were among the wheat and chaff. Praise the Lord, that through faith in Jesus, we live with the confidence that we are among the wheat. May our everyday lives reveal to all those we touch that Christ’s love is our calling.

**Epiphany 2**

Isaiah 62:1-5

What greater glory could there be than to be the bride of Christ? Isaiah foresees the time when Christ’s bride, the church, will shine like the dawn. Through faith, we are that glorious bride of Christ, though that glory is now hidden under a cross. Nevertheless, by the grace and sacrifice of our Savior God, Jesus Christ, we are still a crown of splendor in the Lord’s hand and his royal diadem. May our status as Christ’s bride lead us to show forth his glory with our gifts of time and treasure.

1 Cor. 12:1-11

We often say, “Everyone is different,” when a person doesn’t respond or act the way others expect. Praise God that everyone truly *is* different! Each individual is a totally unique combination designed by him to help carry out his plan of bringing the news of salvation to the entire world. Our talents, abilities, and even disabilities are to be used to glorify and serve him. Our local congregations provide many opportunities to serve, some of high visibility and many more behind the scenes—something different for every different person. Let us pray that God sends the Holy Spirit into our hearts to show us how we can serve him, because as different as we all are, through God’s grace we are all the same, equally forgiven and saved for eternal life by Christ’s death on the cross and his victory over death on Easter morning.

John 2:1-11

Logic might indicate that Jesus’ first miracle should be something more amazing, more noble than this. It shows how concerned God is about every aspect of our lives. Notice also the generosity of our Lord: 120 to 180 gallons—and not the cheap stuff either. It was the best! Don’t overlook the last verse. It shows the purpose of all of Jesus’ miracles. They revealed his glory as true God. He is exactly who he says he is! The miracles did not create faith in the disciples’ hearts. The Holy Spirit did that through the Word. The miracle reinforced what they already had been led to know and believe.

**Epiphany 3**

Isaiah 61:1-6

Jesus used this as his text for his sermon in Nazareth, recorded in Luke 4. After so many centuries the prophet’s words were finally being fulfilled! He is the Servant of the LORD that Isaiah foretold. He had come to free us from our sin. Instead of cowering prisoners, we are now towering oaks! Isn’t it sad that the people of Nazareth rejected him and even tried to kill him? How many countless millions have done the exact same thing? May we always take the prophet’s words seriously, so that we hold Jesus in our hearts as our one and only Savior.

1 Cor. 12:12-21, 26-27

Wouldn’t it be wonderful if we all had beautiful voices and sang in the choir? Wouldn’t it be great if each one of us had the ability to stand up in the front of the congregation and preach a powerful sermon? Wouldn’t it be terrific if all the men were ushers and all the women were on altar guild? Oh, wait a minute, maybe not! Who would sit in the pews and listen to the sermon and hear the music? God has given each of us gifts and abilities that we can use to serve him. Some of us are better at planning a fellowship event than washing dishes, and some of us are better at unloading folding chairs than counting the offering. Yet together we are able to make the church run smoothly, to spread the gospel in our communities and throughout the world.

Luke 4:14-21

Humility and faith are necessary and they go together. Only the poor need the good news. Only the prisoner needs freedom. Only the blind need sight. Only the oppressed need release. Jesus was anointed to bring us that good news of salvation, freedom from sin, the sight of faith, and release from the oppression of death and the devil. Through the gospel preached to us week after week we are experiencing the year of the Lord’s favor. With humility and faith, let us bring that good news, freedom, and sight to many others as we support the gospel ministry of our congregation and synod.

**Epiphany 4**

Jeremiah 1:4‑10

We sometimes name Jeremiah “the reluctant prophet.” When called, he felt inadequate for the task, just like we sometimes don’t think we have the resources to accomplish great things for God. Does your mouth feel reluctant? Your finances? Your clock or your energy? Whatever threatens to squeeze the willing spirit out of us, our Lord answers with some inspiration: First is the fact he’s been planning on our partnership for a long time. Second comes the command to just do it anyway, infused with the promise to accompany us no matter what. Then he breathes his power and purpose through us, opening our eyes to see that somehow he will do awesome things through us. Saying “yes” to God opens up interesting, meaningful, and positive stewardship!

1 Cor. 12:27-13:13

In his famous “love chapter” Paul lists some spiritual gifts, pointing out that they are meaningless without love. Sometimes we get so involved in our serving and giving, along with the rush of our work and home life, that we forget *why* we do what we do. God loved us enough to plan our salvation from mankind’s first moment of sin. He loved us so much that he sent his Son to live among us and experience all the same heartaches and joys that we know, but without sinning. He loved us so much that he allowed his perfect, precious Son to be crucified to pay the price for our sins. He loved us so much that he raised Jesus to life again, so that we can be with him in eternity. *That* is love! *That* is why we serve him!

Luke 4:20-32

Jesus’ words outraged his hearers because they implied salvation for the Gentiles. The people of Nazareth didn’t want to think of themselves as poor, blind, and oppressed prisoners. But they also didn’t want to share the good news with those they considered blind and oppressed. How do we respond to the gospel? The desire to share the good news with others through our gifts and time is in direct proportion to how much we see the need for ourselves. Jesus said, “Whoever has been forgiven little, loves little.” May we see our great need and the Lord’s great love. Then we will naturally bring that same love to others.

**Transfiguration**

Exodus 34:29-35

Miracles played a regular role in the life and times of some of those we meet in Scripture. Moses’ glowing face is a classic example of God using a miracle to remind the people of Israel of just who they were dealing with. The miracle of Jesus’ transfiguration is another example of God reminding people who ultimately is in charge. Every time we confess ours sins and are assured they are forgiven we have experienced the miracle of God’s forgiveness even though we are sinful, covetous, self-focused people. What is even more miraculous is the same God who forgives our sins compels us to live for him every day. We come to God’s house to be forgiven and to share a portion of our worldly wealth, so that the message of forgiveness can continue to be proclaimed.

2 Corinthians 4:3-6

The striking tragedy in the drama between Creator and created, is that the ones who were made have no earthly idea about the careful planning, loving craftsmanship, and devoted protection God has freely given them. Only when Jesus “shows up” through means of grace, does the first light of understanding begin to dawn in their hearts. “God really loves me.” “He’s accomplished the unthinkable for me.” “He met every righteous demand for me.” And now, one of the loveliest results of this incredible truth? The created suddenly thrill to serve their Creator!

Luke 9:28‑36

Build a shelter for the God of the universe and for two men who already live in eternal paradise? Peter’s idea came from a sleepy head. We know what that’s like, don’t we? Sometimes we get harebrained ideas about how our church could do ministry. Now, it’s great to have ideas! But as we think them through, something important should emerge: What does this idea do for helping people listen to God’s Son? That, after all, is the Father’s main purpose for our ministry!

**Ash Wednesday**

Isaiah 59:12‑20

God’s Jewish people were stewards of the truth, but they had dropped it in the dirt; they were not living by his truths, and their sins were only piling up. The Lord Jehovah, however, never fails in stewarding his truth. He made sure sin would be dealt with correctly and fully. He came himself to do it! Because of his faithfulness, the Scriptures’ truths have gone into all the world, even far into the West, and we have learned to fear and love and trust him. It is his faithfulness that inspires us to faithfully steward his truths everywhere.

2 Corinthians 5:20b-6:2

At this moment in history the Lord is giving us the opportunity to share with others locally and far beyond our zip code the good news that Jesus went up to Jerusalem to be this world’s Savior. The offerings we place into our offering plate today are one way we can make sure the good news of our Savior is delivered in our locality but also throughout the world through the ministry of our Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod.

Luke 18:9-14

The parable of the Pharisee and tax collector is really about us. We have the sinful nature of the Pharisee that wanted to take credit for words and actions that appear to be good on the outside even though motives are far from perfect. The Pharisee was full of pride. C.S. Lewis once said that “pride is the great sin.” Pride moves us to look down on everyone and doesn’t allow us to look up. The tax collector, on the other hand, teaches us to look up when our sins put us down. Not only is there forgiveness for our countless sins that the sinful nature likes to overlook, but we look up to Jesus as the one for whom we thankfully live and give and serve.

Psalm 51a

God is a holy judge but not an eager one. All of his holy court’s evidence points to only one possible verdict for me: guilty as charged. He is justified in that assessment of my life. But because of his startling love expressed to me in Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection, he also justifies the sentence of my life. Through Jesus I am that clean! What a difference that makes in my desire to serve him. It’s not fear or guilt compelling me toward holy living; it is only gratitude spurring on my gifts of love. It is only thankfulness driving my acts of kindness to others. I can’t help what I am now; he has determined my innocence!

**Lent 1**

Deuteronomy 26:5-10

During this season of Lent, we are reminded of the “mighty hand” and “outstretched arm” of God in our lives. We may have been among those who have lost our job because of downsizing, or who have struggled with the inability to live a “normal” life because of injury or disease, or have experienced neglect or abuse in our personal relationships. It is difficult for us, just as it was difficult for those who were led by Moses out of Egypt, to focus on the “miraculous signs and wonders” that come our way every day, keeping us filled with spiritual food. God weaves his love, healing hope, and care into our lives. All that we are and have and will be comes to us from God. During Lent we concentrate upon the risen Christ of Easter, firstfruit of God given for us with unconditional love. Just as God has given us this precious gift, we are privileged to bring our firstfruit gifts to him in the forms of our time, talent, and treasure.

Romans 10:8b‑13

Heart and mouth go together in the Christian. It has never been the end of faith to simply know Jesus died for sinners. When you believe he died for you, it’s only natural to call to him. Are you stewarding your prayer time too? To have the one called Jehovah, the great I Am, on your side—the remover of sins, giver of hope, promise of paradise—it makes you long to have whatever he is willing to give you. A daily prayer that makes so much sense is, “Lord Jesus, forgive all my sins!” How wonderful his assurance: You will never be disappointed by looking to me!

Luke 4:1-13

It’s not a fair fight when you really look at the daily struggle between humankind and Satan’s assaults. His temptations run so parallel to our own evil desires and fleshly demands that we can confuse our sinful disobedience for perfectly natural requests. Thank God for our Substitute! In love, Jesus took the fight to Satan, conquering his wicked attempts with God’s powerful truth. And now God’s truth says it’s still an unfair fight. When we resist the devil using God’s Word, our enemy doesn’t stand a chance! People free from Satan are people free to make God’s Word their priority. That’s just good, plain, thankful, stewardship modeled after our Savior himself!

**Lent 2**

Jeremiah 26:8-15 or Luke 13:31-35

Today’s Old Testament and Gospel readings share with us the boldness of the prophet Jeremiah and our Savior. It is evident that nothing was going to derail Jeremiah or Jesus from accomplishing the work each was called to do. May all of us emulate Jeremiah and Jesus in our own lives as Christians. May the Lord compel us to let nothing take our focus off our main purpose in life, which is summed up quite well by our synod’s theme: “Christ’s Love, Our Calling.” May the way we manage our lives, our finances, and our time reveal that Jesus has a grip on us.

Philippians 3:17—4:1

On this second Sunday in Lent, the message of Scripture is sadly and even painfully clear. In our world today—with mass media, super-powered communication devices, instant news flashes of crises occurring in every corner of the earth—we are living in the Information Age. We reflect upon the daily crises that bombard our television and computer screens. We see the seemingly hopeless situations in which some men, women, and children are placed and ask ourselves “Why?” We look at the leadership under which these crises occur—in foreign countries, in our country, in our towns, and in our families. With a touch on the Internet, we can communicate with people we will never meet and “listen” to their life stories. We may not “hear” the true pain and hopelessness they may feel. We may not “hear” that they have not yet realized that “their mind is on earthly things” or that “many live as enemies of the cross of Christ.” Do we use our God-given time to really listen? Do we take the time to share that “we eagerly await a Savior,” that we believe in the risen Christ of Easter? Do we “stand firm in the Lord?”

Psalms 42-43

Malnourished bodies beg for nutritional attention—so do thirsty souls! But the only attention that quenches our spiritual craving is the living water of God’s holy Word. His “light and truth” of forgiveness in Jesus are the only answers to the natural darkness in our souls and the daily deceptions in our hearts. So, our only true hope rests in Jesus’ sacrifice for our sin. And God’s singular hope is that we respond the same way anyone would respond when someone is kind enough to offer them a drink. Our joy-filled, firstfruit gifts of love, are the thank yous he thrills to see.

**Lent 3**

Exodus 3:1-8b, 10-15

To come near God, we learn with Moses, is to stand on holy ground. What grace that we can even approach God at all, in Christ! Note in the lesson what the result will be when God single-handedly rescues his people of old: They will return to God to worship him. May we likewise worship our holy God by all we think, say, and do in response to his grace.

1 Corinthians 10:1-13

On this third Sunday in Lent we remember a story from Moses’ time that also applies today. How are we to live our lives? By what example? That of our peers, our friends, our coworkers, our family, our parents? We are to follow Christ’s example. Do we? Although we may have eaten the “spiritual food and drank the same spiritual drink” as our forefathers and have experienced drinking from the “spiritual rock” that is Christ, we are, nevertheless, sinners, just as the people led by Moses. They were warned not to be idolaters, not to commit sexual immorality, not to test the Lord, and not to grumble—warnings that we also often ignore.

How blessed we are, how cared for! As we remain focused on Christ as our Savior, we have the promise that “God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear.” God gives us everything we need, even the resources to make wise decisions, and when we don’t, a “way out” to again “stand firm” and remain faithful in him. How can we thank him for these generous, unconditional gifts of love?

Luke 13:1-9

In the aftermath of a major tragedy, survivors often find themselves trying to find answers to questions like “How could this happen?”, “What do I do now?”, or the more fundamental “Why me?” Christians who have placed their trust in today’s popular “success theologies” may feel like they’ve received a sucker punch to the gut, as they’re now forced to ask, “Is my sin greater than that of those around me?” In this text, Jesus responds with a resounding “I tell you, no!” and then reminds the rest of us that “unless you repent, you too will all perish.” With his death on the cross, Christ paid the price for sin once and for all, and now lives to nurture and prune our faith. Although life’s hardships and tragedies remain, we may rest securely knowing that we are at peace with God.

Psalm 38

Repentance is such a necessary Lenten theme. At the heart of our repentance is a confident trust in God’s mercy. Being sorry for sorry’s sake *isn’t* repentance. Promising to amend our sinful failure *isn’t* repentance either. Repentance *is* acknowledging our sin before a holy God, but then completely relying on his love to make amends for us. It was Jesus’ life of perfection and his divine rejection that makes us right with our God. Our gifts of love come too late in this relationship to impress God or earn his favor. Our gifts of love come at the very end in grateful recognition of our Lord’s amazing mercy!