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 A 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 1**

Isaiah 63:7-9

“I will tell of the kindnesses of the LORD, the deeds for which he is to be praised.” That’s an excellent way of summarizing your life—as a Christian, as a member of a congregation, and as a part of a synod. We live to declare the praises of our God. God sent his Son to be the world’s Savior from sin. The Christmas season gives a wonderful opportunity to tell others about it. May the Savior born for you inspire you to declare his praises to others and to support your local and worldwide kingdom work with your gifts to him!

Galatians 4:4-7

God has made us his heirs. To non-Christians, if they think about it at all, that probably seems like something pretty intangible—not at all like a grandfather’s tool chest, an aunt’s china, money, or real estate. But God has given us absolutely every good thing in this world. Even more, he sent his Son to be born to human parents, to live among us and know us, and to take our place on the cross and die for our sins. Because of this great love and forgiveness, we need to be good stewards of all we have, both tangible and intangible. We need to share our heavenly inheritance with others by sharing the news of salvation through Christ, and demonstrate God’s love by the way we live and the priorities we set. With his guidance, we need to show others that this heavenly legacy is worth far more than any earthly gift.

Matthew 2:13-15, 19-23

Almost from birth, Jesus was under attack by evil. Jesus and his parents were forced to flee to Egypt and then to Nazareth. How did they finance these journeys? Perhaps with the gifts given by the Magi. The point is that when we give our gifts of love to Jesus, God will make those a blessing for his people in ways we may not have guessed.

**Epiphany**

Isaiah 60:1-6

In the Eastern church the festival of the Epiphany of our Lord is the big celebration, not Christmas. Sadly, it tends to be the forgotten festival among us. It only gets celebrated if January 6 happens to fall on a Sunday. 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. Our offerings are just one way in which we thank the Lord for compelling us to believe in the Epiphany of our Lord.

Matthew 2:1-12

The Magi from the East are a classic example of what happens once the Lord has a grip on peoples’ hearts. These men and their entourage traveled for miles, over some pretty rough terrain, to worship their king. One of the ways they worshiped their king was by giving him gifts fit for a king. The same Savior with whom they shared their gifts, is the one with whom we share our gifts of time, talents, and money.

Psalm 72

On the last day all rulers and all nations will bow before the King of kings and Lord of lords. We realize quickly that this King is not some tyrant but rather the one who gives righteousness—his righteousness. He defends the afflicted and needy including you and me. He alone has done the marvelous thing of rescuing us from an eternity of misery. All the more reason to praise him by bringing our very best gifts—fit for King Jesus.

**Baptism of Our Lord**

Isaiah 42:1-7

Isaiah describes some very awesome things about the coming Messiah. He is God’s servant come to fulfill God’s will that he be the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. He is a loving Savior who will not “snuff out” people when they are weak or hurting. He is the one sent by the Creator and Preserver of this earth. He is the one who has taken hold of our hand and led us through life. He is the one who motivates us to put our Christianity into practice with our everyday lives. The offerings we bring to worship each week are an example of something that we do that is compelled by faith in our Savior.

Acts 10:34-38

Years later, Peter looks back on Jesus’ baptism in the Jordan River. That event revealed Jesus as the Christ, the Anointed One who would be our perfect substitute. This Savior is not just for the people of Israel or for a select few. He is the Savior of the whole world. So when we reach out with the gospel we never have to ask, “Does God want this person to know the Savior?” The answer is a resounding, “Yes!”

Matthew 3:13-17

Strictly speaking, our Savior did not need to be baptized. He had no sin that needed to be forgiven. Nevertheless, in a way, our Savior did need to be baptized. He came here to be just like one of us. He came to be our substitute. God the Holy Spirit descends like a dove and God the Father thunders his approval from heaven. All three persons of the Trinity are working together with a common goal—the salvation of our souls. Jesus is the Christ, the Anointed One, the one set apart from eternity to be our Savior. Without knowing and believing this, no one can practice true stewardship.

Psalm 45

Psalm 45 describes the Messiah King who will free his people from the oppression of sin. This king shares his victories and his treasures with his bride and with his people. It concludes with the vow to perpetuate his memory through all generations. Since the Messiah King shares his victory and treasures with us, it is fitting for us to use those treasures in ways that will perpetuate his memory through all generations.

**Epiphany 2**

Isaiah 49:1-6

The gospel lesson for today shows how John the Baptist points to Jesus as the Lamb of God who would take away the sins of the world. At that time, the words that the Prophet Isaiah had spoken some seven centuries earlier began to be fulfilled. Jesus is the Servant of the LORD. His work would be winning forgiveness for all people—both Jews and Gentiles alike. That promise is just as good as it was 2,700 years ago. Jesus is our Savior, too. That message is the only thing that can equip us to be faithful Christian stewards.

1 Corinthians 1:1-9

Like the people of Corinth whom Paul addresses in the Epistle reading, we as Christians are to continuously watch and “eagerly wait for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed.” The part of this message that we do not always emphasize in this verse is “you do not lack any spiritual gift.” Our spiritual connection with God will keep us “strong to the end.” Our privilege as Christians is to cherish that connection, to remain faithful to him just as he remains endlessly devoted and eternally faithful to us. How simple that sounds. Remain faithful; remain connected every day, in every way until our last breath. Through the gifts of the Spirit, and only with the power available to us through Jesus Christ and his unconditional love for every sinner, we can maintain this connection. There are many worldly distractions, choices, and barriers to our remaining faithful. During the Christmas season we probably experienced innumerable examples of attempted distractions. As we move away from the commercialism and into this Epiphany season, we can focus in retrospect on how we are to manage our lives for spiritual maintenance.

John 1:29-41

The word “Epiphany” means “revealed.” John the Baptist reveals Jesus as the Lamb of God—the one that the Passover sacrifice was foreshadowing. Just like the blood of that lamb saved the Israelites from the angel of death at the first Passover, so also the blood of the perfect Lamb of God saves us from eternal death. Both John the Baptist and the apostle Andrew were eager to lead other people to their Savior. We live in a world where precious few know Jesus. Many who do know his name don’t know who he really is. Look for opportunities to continue the Epiphany today and point people to Jesus as their Savior.

Psalm 89

In this psalm we sing of the Lord’s great love forever. In this life we have the privilege of praising our God not only with our voices, but also with our time, talents, and treasures. By the grace of giving, God gives us a foretaste of the joy of heaven.

**Epiphany 3**

Isaiah 9:1-4

If nations attacked Israel from the north, the tribes of Zebulun and Naphtali would be the first to feel the sting. They were also the furthest from Jerusalem. Consequently, they were often the furthest from God. But Jesus would spend most of his earthly life in “Galilee of the Gentiles.” Through the Word and sacraments, God brought us from the darkness of unbelief into the light of faith, just like he did with them. Now that we can see the light, we are lights reflecting the love of the Savior to a sin-darkened world.

1 Corinthians 1:10-17

The congregation in Corinth was a congregation with a lot of problems. Paul addresses one of those problems here. They were dividing up into cliques based on which pastor they liked best. This bickering threatened to destroy the peace and unity that God wanted them to have. How many times haven’t very similar things happened in our voters’ meetings? We waste time quibbling about things that have no real lasting value. The gospel ministry almost becomes an afterthought. It’s not all about us! It’s not all about what we want! It’s all about Christ and his sacrifice for us. If Christ is our focus, we will be faithful managers of our time, talents, and treasures.

Matthew 4:12-23

Whatever we do, if we do it for God, he will help us to do it better. When Peter and Andrew went fishing that day, they never could have imagined anything better than the economic benefit in filling their nets with fish. Then Jesus came along and showed them a better way to keep on fishing: “Come, follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.” Whatever job you may have, whether menial or important, it is God’s gift to provide for the needs of yourself, your family, and to serve others. Jesus came to live and work among us, to know us and understand us, to die for our sins and rise again for our salvation. We cannot possibly thank him for all he has done for us, but we can start by doing everything, using everything, to bring glory to his name.

Psalm 27

How great is our God? He is our Light—we can see exactly where we need to go. He is our Salvation—he has rescued us from every last sin. He is our Stronghold—when life is tough and we don’t know where to turn, we have a safe place to go. What is the one thing we want, most of all, as we think about all the things God has done for us? Lord, I want to spend some time in your house. I want to look at the incredible things you’ve done for me and contemplate them. I want to see and hear the ways you reveal yourself in your Word. Is there any better way to use our time and energy?

*Christian Worship: Supplement*

1 John 2:3-11

Our claim that we are believers is shown in lives that emulate Jesus. The primary virtue of Jesus is love. He loved us and gave himself for us. He loved others and gave himself in service to others. May we learn to love like Jesus by giving ourselves and what we have in service to others and the salvation of souls.

**Epiphany 4**

Micah 6:1-8

Just as God redeemed Israel from slavery in Egypt, he has redeemed us from slavery to sin by sending Christ to suffer and die for our sins and rise again from the tomb. Just as he brought the Israelites to a land of plenty, he has blessed us with material wealth. Like the Israelites, we tend to grumble and complain, even in the face of plenty. Then we try to make up for our ingratitude by giving a larger offering or by volunteering for another committee. Yet the largest offerings and the most tireless services have no meaning if we aren’t giving our hearts to God. We need to humbly acknowledge that all blessings are from him, that we will never be worthy of the least of them, and that it is only through Christ that we can stand before God. Our offerings and service should come from hearts thankful to God for all he has done for us.

1 Corinthians 1:26-31

God’s stewardship of blessings runs counter to man’s expectations—or, let’s be realistic: man’s expectations try to swim against the current of God’s values. While man would assume honor and power go to the strong and famous, God’s normal is to choose the lowly, the weak, and the despised as objects of his mercy and recipients of his grace. When it comes to our own stewardship of his gifts, it flows with his wisdom when we share them liberally and pour out our efforts in making sure his grace reaches those on the fringes and those who don’t have anything to give back to us.

Matthew 5:1-12

In these beatitudes from the Sermon on the Mount, “blessed” means “happy.” We don’t find happiness in money, power, and material possessions. Happiness comes from being poor in spirit, from meekness, from a thirst for righteousness. For when we have these qualities, we are comforted with the gospel of forgiveness in Jesus our Savior. The gospel brings us true happiness. May we seek to bring this happiness to others, also.

**Epiphany 5**

Isaiah 58:5-9a

Hearts filled with saving faith in Jesus have no illusions about the ability to impress God through act and effort. Our acts and efforts don’t. Instead, hearts who trust God’s promise of forgiveness through Jesus are so moved out of gratitude that they can’t help but express love and thanks through activity. Gratefully struggling to live as our Savior wants us to—that’s the stewardship of a thankful heart!

1 Corinthians 2:1-5

There’s a man in one of our churches whose job places him in front of crowds, and he’s good at public speaking. But he doesn’t want to take any position in his church that would have him speak to others about God. He’s afraid the content is too important, too serious, too easy to mess up. He’s forgotten Paul’s words right here. You don’t have to know a lot to just share what you know. You don’t have to speak powerfully or convincingly on lofty topics of dogmatic complexities. You can keep it simple: Just share that sin makes us all guilty and that our Savior makes us all right with God. Then invite the other person to believe it too.

Matthew 5:13-20

Jesus gave me the job of being a light, a light to the world in fact! How can I possibly do this? I can try to show my love for God in all that I do and say, in the way I manage the money and possessions and gifts he has given me. I can give him back a significant portion of my income with which he has blessed me. But at most that would only provide light for my small area, not the world! I thank God that I don’t have to do this alone. By his grace and mercy, all of us work together, encouraging and strengthening each other as we lift high the light to tell the good news that God sent his Son to die for the sins of the world and to triumph over death and hell.

Psalm 111

“Praise the LORD!” The psalmist begins with these words and provides plenty of evidence why we need to praise the LORD. The LORD has done powerful deeds. Praise him! He is gracious and compassionate. Praise him! He provides food. Praise him! He remembers his promises. Praise him! He has redeemed us. Praise him! The LORD has done everything worthy of praise—not you and me. That changes the way we look at ourselves and the gifts we bring him. We don’t give because we must give something up or hand something over. We give because we have another opportunity to praise him!

**Epiphany 6**

Deuteronomy 30:15-20

Promises, promises. In the Old Testament reading for this sixth Sunday after the Epiphany we are reminded of the promises that God made to the people of Israel—of promises kept. Our lives are filled with choices like the ones enumerated: “life and prosperity, death and destruction . . . life and death, blessings and curses.” And, it is further explained that “the LORD is your life,” and commanded that we “choose life, so that you and your children may live and that you may love the LORD your God, listen to his voice, and hold fast to him.” The promises that he set forth from the ancient times of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob have been continuously fulfilled through God’s power and love. The choices we make and the manner in which we manage the blessings God gives, reflect our connection with the promises of the past, which continue to affect us. The promise of a Savior, fulfilled on Christmas and carried to the cross, the tomb and the risen Christ, is the ultimate proof of God’s unconditional love for all of us sinners. Our promise fulfilled—for obedience to God, for remaining connected with him—is far more than reaching an earthly promised land; ours is eternal life.

1 Corinthians 2:6-13

Isn’t God’s wise plan astounding? Jesus stepped down from power so that he could wade into weakness to rescue us. He accepted a guilty verdict so that we could enjoy the pronouncement of “not guilty.” He promises a heaven we can’t see to all those who do see it by faith. He asks only that we believe these promises—something we do not have the ability to do—but then grants us the miracle-gift of faith so that we can believe it. What little time we have to honor him! What few short breaths we possess to thank him. Yet thank him we will with our every breath and every gift!

Matthew 5:21-37

There’s so much more to righteousness than we thought! How many people have felt good about themselves for never murdering, stealing, or cheating on their spouses—and then Jesus says we’re not just stewards of our bodies; we’re also stewards of our thoughts! It sure is a good thing he paid for all our sins! With that kind of righteousness from him, we get the happy motivation to work on our deeds, words, and thoughts as thank offerings to him who loves us and freed us from our sins.

Psalm 119a

A Christian is the happiest and most blessed person of all. Our happiness is not found in the comforts of life or the abundance of our possessions. Our happiness is found in believing and following the Word of the Lord. Living with God’s Word in our hearts through faith moves us to live as children of God. It is the greatest happiness in life to know that we can live a God-pleasing life through faith.

**Epiphany 7**

Leviticus 19:1,2,17,18

God never teaches us to love ourselves, forgive ourselves, or grow in self-esteem. Self-love comes quite naturally to us all! But because we all experience and know it, he uses our interest in ourselves as the measure of how we steward our relationships. The interest, energy, and time we spend on ourselves is the point of comparison for how much interest we take in our neighbor’s preferences, how much energy we expend on his needs, and how sensitive we are about his hurts and feelings. In fact, let the unique love of our Savior inspire you to give your neighbor preferential treatment!

1 Corinthians 3:10,11, 16-23

Want a confidence builder for today? God built your faith and your new life with him on the immovable truth of Jesus Christ, crucified and risen. Smile, believer, heaven is waiting to welcome you! But you don’t have to wait until heaven to claim victory in this life; you have it RIGHT NOW! Jesus has conquered everything and has given you everything for your use. The world and all its resources are yours to employ for material and spiritual benefit. What a gracious God!

Matthew 5:38-48

Some of Jesus’ lessons are difficult for us sinful mortals to accept. We work hard for our money, right? Shouldn’t it be enough to give it to our congregation and maybe to friends or family if they really, really need it and we are sure of being repaid? And don’t we have our rights? If someone does us wrong, does Jesus actually expect us to just let it go, or, even worse, let it happen all over again? But he was very clear: turn the other cheek, give more than is asked for, go the extra mile. Everything—every good thing we have—is a gift from our heavenly Father, a gift we have done nothing to deserve. This includes our eternal salvation through Christ’s death and resurrection. If he could go to the cross for our sins, surely he can ask us to freely share his gifts and his love with others, with no strings attached.

**Transfiguration**

Exodus 24:12, 15-18

“Come up to me on the mountain and stay here,” said the LORD, “and I will give you the tablets of stone, with the law and commandments I have written for their instruction.” The Israelites had traveled out of captivity and through the wilderness and now witnessed firsthand the smoke and fire on the mountain of the LORD. God often seems more distant to us today. Where are the big miracles, the great demonstrations of divine might? In Moses’ day, however, the greatest miracle of all was that God was speaking directly to man to set out his commandments for his people. This is a miracle we share in as we study God’s Word. We know that God speaks directly to us as he forgives our sin and promises eternal life with him in heaven. His powerful Word creates faith in our hearts that blossoms into fruits of praise to him.

2 Peter 1:16-21

It is so appropriate that the story of the Transfiguration comes just before Lent begins. Before the blood and gore of Lent, we see Jesus on the mountain exalted and glorified. We need that, as did Peter, James, and John. The Heavenly Father attests to his love for Jesus, something we need to remember when Jesus calls out, “My God, my God why have you forsaken me?” on Good Friday. This is the same Jesus that the prophets attested to in the Word when the Holy Spirit inspired them to write. This is the same Jesus we attest to as we dedicate our lives to him by learning more about him and serving him in all we do.

Matthew 17:1-9

Can you imagine? If you had been there, would you believe what you were seeing? Jesus transfigured in white light! Jesus, Moses, and Elijah together in a cloud on a high mountain—a miraculous sight! Peter, James, and John were awestruck and afraid, even “terrified.” There were allusions to “the Son of Man” being “raised from the dead.” Jesus stood before them and prophesied his death and resurrection. Of course, we have the advantage of knowing the rest of the story. We have the written and spoken Word of God in Scripture. The fantastic facts of Jesus’ birth, life, teachings, healings, miraculous actions, suffering, death, resurrection, and the additional promise of his returning, are all available to us. As we manage this life that has been created for us, we learn how to live our lives with unconditional love and never-ending faith through the example of what Jesus (as God and man) gave us. When we, as God’s stewards, are making choices in life, we can look to the Word to answer, “What would Jesus do?”

Psalm 148

The very fact that, though a sinner, God maintains you are close to his heart, is an unfathomable reality. What other possible response can you and I have than to join with all creation in hurling our praises to him. In formal worship? Certainly. In our jobs and schooling too. In our relationships and personal time too. In our recreation and our finances too. What aspect of our lives has not been graciously blessed by him and so deserves to be joyfully harnessed for him? The simple answer? There is none. Let our grateful hearts pour forth our praise every day in every way.