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 B 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.*

**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 people’s 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.

*Christian Worship: Supplement*

Ruth 4:13-17

When Naomi and her daughter-in-law Ruth became widows, Ruth stood by Naomi instead of looking out for her own interests. Here we have the end of the story—how God blessed Ruth through Boaz, who became her husband. This lesson teaches us the importance of serving others and trusting that God will bless us when we do. May that be an incentive to us to use our time, talents, and treasures to serve others and spread the gospel!

**Baptism of Our Lord**

Isaiah 49:1-6

The Gospel lesson for this Sunday shows how Jesus began his public ministry by being baptized by John the Baptist in the Jordan River. At that moment, 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—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.

Acts 16:25-34

What a difference faith makes in our lives. Paul and Silas faced the adversity of jail with prayers and hymns. In contrast, when an earthquake opened the doors of the prison, the unbelieving jailer was about to kill himself. With faith we can face adversity because we know that we are at peace with God. In baptism we are made children of God and heirs of salvation. The gospel of forgiveness in Jesus Christ was brought to the jailer in Word and baptism. What a difference faith made in his life. We support the missions of WELS with our offerings so that many people can experience the hope and joy of the jailer of Philippi.

Mark 1:4-11

In the beginning, when God created the world and all that is in it, he declared everything “good.” God was well-pleased with the work of creation. Through Adam’s sin, that goodness was damaged. But at your baptism, God drowned the original sin in you, and you came forth a new creation, a child of God. As such, you now have access to God’s grace and blessing. You are showered with gifts purely out of divine goodness and mercy. As a person reborn as a child of God, you have both the power and the responsibility to rightly care for all God gives: his creation, your temporal and spiritual gifts, your talents and abilities. This management of all that God gives we call stewardship. It started at your baptism and continues throughout your entire life, until God calls you home to be with him. Use the power of your baptism to make the most of all that you have as a child of God.

Psalm 2

At Jesus’ baptism the Father spoke, calling Jesus his Son. Divinely speaking, the Son has always been the Son from eternity, as described in this psalm. The Father was pleased that Jesus was identifying with sinners by being baptized. Through baptism, God adopts us sinners into his family. What better way to show our appreciation for our baptism than living like God’s children and supporting the spread of Christ’s kingdom.

**Epiphany 2**

1 Samuel 3:1-10

Samuel’s mother was a dedicated believer who sent her son to attend a worker training program under the high priest, Eli. God called Samuel to be his prophet to fill a spiritual void in Israel. Samuel followed that call and served faithfully for many years. Today, we also need dedicated parents who encourage full-time service to the Savior. We need faithful young people who will follow God’s call into the ministry. We need worker training schools to prepare these young people for a lifetime of preaching and teaching the good news of Jesus Christ. We also need all of us to support those schools with our prayers and offerings.

1 Corinthians 6:12-20

When we think of being good stewards of all that we have, we often think externally. We think of managing our money, our time, and our abilities. Rarely do we think of managing our mental and physical health. Just as we can mismanage the temporal gifts of God, we can mismanage the gifts of food and drink, rest and relaxation, work and vocation. Too much food, drink, relaxation, or work can affect our health. As God’s stewards, we learn to manage what we put into and what influences the body, the mind, and the spirit.

John 1:43-51

This text shows how Jesus called Philip to be an apostle. Philip, in turn, found his friend Nathanael (whom we also know as Bartholomew). Philip sets a fine example for us. Instead of trying to argue Nathanael into being a believer, he leads him to the Word himself. The Word does all the convincing. The same is true today. We can’t make people believe. We can lead them to the Word, and the Holy Spirit can make them believers. With something as simple as “Come and see,” another soul was won for Christ and another missionary began his training.

Psalm 67

This psalm prays for the fulfillment of the promise to Abraham that all nations will be blessed through his seed, the Christ. That prayer is answered as the gospel is spread to more and more people, bringing them to faith in Jesus. May we be an answer to this prayer as we also support the spread of the gospel with our prayers and offerings!

**Epiphany 3**

Jonah 3:1-5,10

No prophet was ever more successful outwardly yet more unhappy with God’s grace than Jonah. He didn’t want to go to Nineveh in the first place. He didn’t like it that God was forgiving one of Israel’s chief enemies. Maybe we haven’t been as crass as Jonah, but it is easy for us to try to play God, thinking that some people simply don’t deserve the gospel. No one does! But in his infinite love, God wants nothing more than to have a sinner repent, turn from his ways, and rely on Jesus alone. May God’s mercy to Nineveh and to us move us to share his gospel freely with everyone.

1 Corinthians 7:29-31

When John D. Rockefeller, the wealthy oil baron, died, the news media approached his accountant. “How much did he leave behind?” they wanted to know. “All of it,” the accountant replied. The message is clear. Everything we hold so dear, that seems so real and important to us, is only on loan. It is not ours. God is the owner of all things, even our own bodies, and he will “recall it all” (a phrase used concerning the rich man who built new barns) someday. Even the heavens will be “rolled up like a scroll” says Revelation. The message for stewards? Don’t get too wrapped up in the world, because it’s not ours to possess. Out of his grace and goodness, God gives all things to us to manage as his caretakers.

Mark 1:14-20

Ever since Christ came into the world, things have been different. The kingdom of God is near. We must respond to it. We can’t just shrug it off or push it to a later date on our “to do” list. It demands our immediate attention. It’s a matter of life and death—eternity. How do we enter the kingdom of God? Repent, Jesus said. Through repentance and faith, the kingdom of God is ours. Now, what do we do with it? We cast it out into the world, like fishermen cast out a net. Some will listen to Jesus’ call and do that in full-time ministry. But the kingdom of God is not just theirs to share. It is still ours by faith. All of us need to cast out the net into the world. Supporting the mission and ministry of WELS is one way we participate in spreading the kingdom of God and fishing for men.

Psalm 62

If only I had . . . What do you want—riches, honor, security? Don’t look for those in anything tangible. Rest in God alone. Talk about a Rock, a Fortress, a Refuge! Look for what matters most in this life and the next: A God who saved you; an unshakeable future that can never perish, spoil, or fade; riches that don’t wear out—for eternity. Trust in him at all times, for he alone is our Rock and Salvation.

*Christian Worship: Supplement*

Acts 13:1-5

Paul and Barnabas were called to go on the first mission journey. What does it mean in this reading when it says that the church in Antioch “sent them off”? Does it mean they said good-bye? No, much more than that. They sent them off with the support of the church for their journey. They would need food, clothing, money for travel, etc. The mission trips of Paul were not a one-man operation but were the work of the church at large. In the same way, missionaries today are not out in the world on their own. We support them with our gifts to the mission and ministry of WELS.

**Epiphany 4**

Deuteronomy 18:15-20

So many tips for healthier living. So many rules for better parenting. So many guidelines for a more effective use of your time. It’s no wonder we’re so overwhelmed and underqualified for this life—no one could possibly do everything we’re supposed to! Thank God for his Prophet of truth! It’s only from Jesus’ lips that we can know God’s heart. It’s Jesus’ words that bring certain peace. It’s only in Jesus’ life and death that we are free from all of those “do’s.” And now it’s our serving, living, and applying his truth each day that is the measure of our “thank you” to him.

1 Corinthians 8:1-13

“It is for freedom that Christ has set us free!” Being free from the law and its consequences means that God has entrusted a lifetime’s worth of freedom for each of our lives. It follows then that a Christian’s thankful living often consists in the stewardship of his or her freedom. Our love for Jesus is expressed in our love for others—and using our freedom to benefit them.

Mark 1:21-28

The monster that strives to repossess our hearts often uses more subtle tactics than the overt possession of Mark 1, but make no mistake—whether it’s our own sinful nature or the devil himself, our faith is under relentless attack by enemies much stronger and craftier than we are. Thanks be to Jesus that our Rescuer is mightier still! With the same powerful Word he drives greed, fear, resentment, and coveting from our hearts. Thankful people indeed!

Psalm 1

Psalm 1 presents two responses to God’s Word. On the one hand are those who love the Word and make use of it constantly. They are called blessed. On the other hand are those who mock God’s truth. They are called wicked and their way will perish. May God’s Word be our delight—both learning it ourselves and helping others hear the life-giving message as we support gospel ministry.

**Epiphany 5**

Job 7:1-7

Life this side of the veil can be so difficult. And why shouldn’t it be? It isn’t God’s fault that sin entered this world. What we often experience are simply the consequences. In fact, the only relief from the misery, hurt, and seeming futility of living life in a sinful world is God’s answer to that sin. Unmerited forgiveness through Jesus is what gives us relief. Promised protection for God’s family is what gives us hope. Unending life in heaven is what grants us peace. Our natural response? Thankful living and giving despite our troubles. That’s the “thank you” card each believer has the opportunity to write every single day.

1 Corinthians 9:16-23

Wouldn’t it be nice to be able to do whatever you wanted with what you have? You could choose to spend all your money on movie tickets and spend all your time at the cinema. Not! What would happen to your house, car, or job—not to mention your family? All might be lost. God empowers us through his Holy Spirit to show our love for him through how we manage his gifts. We are not slaves to a set of rules for stewardship. We don’t live by our rights, but by our privileges. We don’t demand things of God; we bask in his grace. Christian stewardship is voluntary. By our actions in managing all God has given us we show love to God and all humankind.

Mark 1:29-39

Money talks. So too a picture painted well. Actions even louder. Demons, wicked and liars, were not permitted to speak God’s precious truths. And Jesus—he speaks infinitely, even with just his name. That he lets us speak his truths and share in the zeal of making him known speaks volumes of love for us from him!

Psalm 103

Thankful hearts are eager to have an object for their praise and thanks, and the Christian need look no further than the Source of every single blessing: the LORD. Not only do we owe him our gratitude for every good thing, but most importantly because he has forgiven all our sins and redeemed us from the pit. The very fact that we have thankful hearts of faith is another testament to his gracious love and a reason for us to be careful, grateful stewards of our whole lives.

**Transfiguration**

2 Kings 2:1-12

Walking together along the dusty path, two men head for destiny. It would have been too easy for Elisha to stop somewhere and let Elijah walk on. And it is too easy for us to watch someone else work for the Lord. But the stakes were too high for Elisha—the benefit too wonderful, too necessary! Our journey in ministry is also too important and too full of blessings to stop walking together.

2 Corinthians 3:12-4:2

“When I grow up I want to be like \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.” Fill in the blank. Is it too late? Are you grown up and missed your chance to be like \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_? Is it unlikely that you could ever be like \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_? What if your model were Jesus? What would transform you into his likeness? It is the Holy Spirit working through our baptism that transforms us into a new creation. Our reading says we become like Jesus “with ever-increasing glory.” It is a journey. Part of that journey is to learn to love like Jesus. Part of that journey is to learn to give like Jesus. While not many of us will ever give our lives for another, we can live our lives for others. We can learn to give like Jesus as we practice managing our lives in such a way that all of God’s gifts are used in his service.

Mark 9:2-9

On that unparalleled day in human history, when three of Jesus’ dear ones observed what sinners should never see, Peter was moved to cry, “It is good for us to be here!” So Jesus promptly led them down the mountain to learn and serve, because that is how thankful hearts show their love. When we see God’s love through our eyes of faith, our hearts cry with Peter, “It is good for us to be here!”—to be here in God’s family, here worshiping with fellow believers, here safe through Jesus’ selfless work. But like Peter, saying our salvation “is good” is one thing. Showing just how good it is to us by learning and serving is quite another. May God always prompt our active thanks in all we think, say, and 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.

*Christian Worship: Supplement*

2 Corinthians 4:3-6

As bright as Jesus once shone on the mountain and as clearly as he revealed himself to the world as its Savior during his ministry, our murky, sin-filled hearts would never have allowed us to see, understand, or appreciate our Redeemer. It’s only by God’s powerful and undeserved work—the good news of our forgiveness—that his light of truth shines in our hearts. Now we do see him—God’s exquisite, glorious, out-of-this-world, love expressed so clearly in the person of Jesus Christ. What more can we say but, “thank you, Lord!”

**Ash Wednesday**

Isaiah 59:12-20

Wouldn’t it be great to see God’s majestic grace burst out into the world like a breached dam or a tsunami rolling ashore? From the Middle East his glorious gospel is still spreading across the globe, and whole tribes and villages and communities and families are repenting in his name. It is happening. The question is: Are we inside that flood of grace our Savior is spreading in the world?

2 Corinthians 5:20b-6:2

The apostle Paul makes it very clear that, thanks to all Jesus accomplished, we are “reconciled to God . . . now is the time of God’s favor, now is day of salvation.” Now is the time to be at God’s work with our lips, our lives, and our total commitment to the Lord’s church. May the management of our time and money reveal that we really believe in the urgency of getting the Lord’s work done now rather than later.

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. 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 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!

*Christian Worship: Supplement*

Acts 5:1-11

God isn’t impressed with the outward signs of repentance unless they reflect the inner love of our hearts. He gave his one and only Son, the best of what he had, to free us from sin and hell so that we could be free to live for him on earth and with him in heaven. How can we offer anything but the first and best of what we have as our “thank you” card of love?

**Lent 1**

Genesis 22:1-18

If God spoke to you and tested your sacrificial limits, how far would you be able and willing to go? Would you “go the distance” as did Abraham, Moses, and God himself when he sacrificed his Son, Jesus Christ, for your sins? During this season of Lent we reflect upon such questions.

Romans 8:31-39

“If God is for us, who can be against us? . . . Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?” Given the passion and the promises of our Savior, it is quite impossible to prove you can suffer true harm from being generous toward God!

Mark 1:12-15

Jesus spent so much of his valuable time convincing anyone who would listen that their sin was real, debilitating, and deadly. He wanted people to recognize how far away they were from stirring anything like love in the heart of God. He wanted them to conclude that any hope would have to be placed somewhere else—in someone else. But is there any better news in this whole, wide world than the news Jesus shared next—the same news God has shared with us so generously? Guilt? Gone. Shame? Removed. Fear? There’s no reason. Our loving God’s good news is that Jesus has taken care of everything that’s wrong with us. We live to serve him with our gifts, thank him with our time, and love him with everything that we are, because he gave everything he is for us.

Psalm 6

A Christian’s life is sometimes marked with sin and sorrow, groaning and weeping. Our only recourse is to come to the Lord in confession and prayer. Instead of reacting with anger and wrath, God comes with his full and free forgiveness. Such repentance equips us to renew our day to day life as children of God, offering our lives and all we have as tokens of our thanks.

*Christian Worship: Supplement*

Psalm 3

Life is disconcerting. There are unscheduled surprises each new day. There’s the tenuous hold we have on our relationships, work, and success. Godless immorality is a rising tide threatening to sweep away every good thing in its path. Yet the certainty and safety of our position couldn’t possibly be more secure. The LORD is our deliverance! In Jesus, we’ve been pulled up from the grave and carried safely from all our earthly and spiritual enemies. We don’t lose out on anything when we offer ourselves to him in our relationships, work, and gifts. These countless opportunities to acknowledge his love are privileged seats for those who receive his grace.

**Lent 2**

Genesis 28:10-17 (18-22)

Promises . . . How do we respond? God made promises to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and their descendants. In a dream, God spoke to Jacob, “Your descendants will be like the dust of the earth, and you will spread out to the west and to the east, to the north and to the south. All peoples on earth will be blessed through you and your offspring . . . I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you.” In Genesis 28:18-22 we read about a promise from Jacob in response to the loving promise of his Lord that he will give back one tenth of what the Lord has given to him. God gives us all that we have and everything that we are and can be. Your time, talent, and treasure all come from God! Are you willing and able to give back proportionately to what God has given to you? Try it! You'll like it! Try it for a week, a month, a year, a lifetime!

Romans 5:1-11

Consider just how many daily functions depend on performing a task at precisely the right time. Swing the bat too soon and you have a strike instead of a home run. Take out the brownies too early and you have a gooey mess instead of a chewy treat. In this chapter of Romans we see that our salvation is also a matter of careful timing: “At just the right time . . . Christ died for the ungodly.” But when is the right time to save a wretched sinner? Is it before we’ve had a chance to do too much harm? Is it once we’ve hit rock-bottom and have truly realized the depth of our sin? Is it once we’ve made a decision to turn away from wicked behavior and to live righteously? No! Paul writes that Christ died “when we were still powerless.” He writes that, “while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” We were not saved when we were good and ready. We were saved while we were still deep in the muck of iniquity. Let us all give thanks that we have a God who doesn’t wait for us to realize our own need before calling us to him.

Mark 8:31-38

Consider how many of our decisions we make by asking ourselves, “Is it worth it?” We might not realize how often our sinful nature asks the same question in response to Jesus’ invitation to deny ourselves, take up our cross, and follow him. On our own our answer would always be, “No, this suffering or this struggle or this sacrifice is not worth the cost!” Yet we are not our own! And neither is our life. Deny yourself. Endure present difficulties. Follow him. He has given us life. He has given us hope. He has given us the kingdom.

Psalm 73

How often have we been like Asaph in this psalm, envious of the prosperity of the wicked? How many times have we suffered for doing the right thing or prospered from casting a blind eye to God’s law? To our human eyes, this is indeed a great mystery. But thanks be to God that he uses this to lead us to trust in him ever more greatly and to provide us with opportunities to use our talents in God-pleasing ways.