

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.*

**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.

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*

1 Kings 10:1-9

The Queen of Sheba was moved by the words and works of King Solomon and responded in faith with gifts of gold, spices, and gems. We have had the privilege of hearing the wisdom of one greater than Solomon, our Lord Jesus Christ. In his Word we are made wise for salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. It is fitting that we respond in faith with gifts of our own that show our appreciation for the wisdom of faith.

**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.

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**

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.

Psalm 133-134

Our unity as God’s people is founded on the truth of God’s Word, the teaching of “life forevermore” through Jesus. Sin and false teaching threaten to divide us. That means we who have, by God’s grace, been entrusted with his truth have a tremendous responsibility to not only preserve it but also to share it. May we use all that we have and are toward that goal.

*Christian Worship: Supplement*

Ephesians 3:14-21

May Paul’s prayer for the Ephesians be our prayer for ourselves and for one another. As we contemplate God’s Word, may we continue to marvel at the height, depth, and lengths of God’s love for us in Christ. We see Jesus’ love even in little things, like changing water into wine. May we see his love at work in our lives, forgiving our sins and opening heaven to us. Surrounded by God’s love in Christ, let us trust that he can do more than we ask or imagine. With that faith, our gifts to his work will flow naturally.

**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 can make the church run smoothly and 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.

Psalm 19

On this Sunday God instructs us to count the cost of following him. Just as a developer evaluates his assets before building a tower and a king counts his troops before marching to battle, Jesus tells us to consider the hardships and losses we will face as we follow him. This isn’t meant as a deterrent from a God who’s interested in leaving us poorer. Psalm 19 reminds us that all the comparative tinsel we might lose in following Jesus is replaced by only pure gold. Count not only the cost of what you leave behind; count the value of what you gain.

*Christian Worship: Supplement*

Acts 4:23-31

Peter and John had miraculously healed a lame beggar. Their reward for this act of kindness and sharing the good news about Jesus was to be thrown in prison. Upon their release, they prayed. They didn’t pray that the Lord would protect them from the authorities, but they prayed for the boldness to proclaim the gospel in the face of persecution. May we also pray for the boldness of faith to witness Jesus and support the gospel ministry with our time and treasures.

**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.

Psalm 78

As we grow older, we begin to think about what kind of legacy we will leave. How will people remember us? Perhaps the community will remember us for some wonderful cause that we supported, or our children will be supported by the wealth we leave behind to them. All these things are fine. What greater legacy can there be than to leave behind a history of sharing God’s Word with the next generation? All other legacies will be forgotten through the fog of time. Inheritance money eventually dries up. However, do not hide the praiseworthy deeds of the LORD, and you leave behind a legacy that lasts into eternity. They will know of their Savior God, and they will tell the next generation, and the next, and the next . . . Do not be stingy with your vocal, public, pointed praise for your God and his great deeds. Do not neglect the blessed opportunities to support such proclamation with the gifts God has given to you. Pass it on. Leave a lasting legacy.

*Christian Worship: Supplement*

1 Kings 17:7-16

A foundational truth of God-pleasing stewardship is a loving trust that says “You first” to God. How could a widow, whose own cupboard was bare, give the last of what she had so God’s prophet could eat? It was because her loving God promised she would always have enough. In loving thanks, she trusted his Word and said, “You first.” God continued to grant her his love as he always had, only this time it was miraculous.

**Epiphany 5**

Isaiah 6:1-8

Isaiah’s call into the ministry illustrates two beautiful principles in our relationship with God: 1) God took the first, most important step in this relationship. In love he has stretched across the divide caused by our sin to touch us with purification through the sacrifice of his Son. Once God has resolved this conflict, 2) forgiven people move from the terror of God’s holiness to an eager desire to thank and serve him. “Use me!” is the natural attitude bursting from the heart of God’s saved people.

Luke 5:1-11

Maybe you love to fish. You might not bring home many fish, but catching seems to be beside the point. It is the fishing that counts. When we are “fishers of men,” we perform an act of stewardship. We use all the gifts God has freely given to us: time, talent, money, and possessions to demonstrate to others God’s great love and forgiveness of sins through the precious blood of Jesus. We may not always see the results of our fishing. Sometimes we will feel like Simon, that we work hard and catch nothing, but if we follow Jesus and continue to fish as he directs us, the nets will be filled with souls for him in eternity.

Psalm 85

“You, Lord, showed favor to your land; you restored the fortunes of Jacob.” With these words the psalmist helps us see just how tremendously blessed we are as God’s children. He then leads us by the hand to show us the greatest gift we’ve ever received: “You forgave the iniquity of your people and covered all their sins.” Throughout human history, God has called messengers, like John the Baptist, to herald this good news. Through their faithful preaching, we have come to know and trust the certain hope made available to us through Christ. We are richly blessed by a God who truly gives us all that is good. Such goodness moves our hearts to respond with joy and gratitude to our gracious Father in heaven.

**Epiphany 6**

Jeremiah 17:5-8

If we can’t trust ourselves, who can we trust? Who can we depend on when our health and strength fail, when our companies are downsized, and our jobs are outsourced? Where can we turn when the benefits we earned are cut back? We definitely can’t depend on ourselves! God invites us to trust him, depend on him, and turn to him when our earthly resources fail. He will give us strength, health, and security for our souls. He sent his Son, who was sinless, to die on the cross for our sins and rise in Easter victory, and he will give us all we need to sustain our lives in this world. Our response should be to serve him in all we do, to use all our strength, abilities, and resources to glorify his holy name and proclaim the gospel of Christ.

1 Corinthians 15:12, 16-20

Death is merely the end of this sinful existence. What happens afterward will be stunning! There will be a “harvest” of believers gleaned from this life for a life with God himself in heaven. Jesus’ resurrection is the firstfruits harvest of God’s saving plan. He’s the proof that death isn’t the end and that there will be a harvest to come! Our firstfruits living is a simple testament of our love and trust. It puts God first in every aspect of our lives until God gathers us for eternity.

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 7**

Genesis 45:3-8a, 15

How could Joseph possibly treat with such grace a family who had resented him, plotted against him, ridiculed him, and sold his life for a profit? Joseph realized that he himself had been treated with exquisite grace. God, in his merciful love had used slavery, false imprisonment, and forgotten promises to not only draw Joseph closer to him but even to save the world from natural disaster and preserve the family line of the promised Savior. The better question is, through God’s gift of faith, how could Joseph see his family as anything but one more way to say “thank you” to the God of undeserved love?

Luke 6:27-38

Jesus had to be kidding, right? He didn’t seriously expect us to let people walk all over us, did he? Why should we let people just take our possessions and damage our property? Why should we love and forgive people who don’t deserve it? But Jesus was very clear: We should love, serve, and forgive others, and our reward will be great. He loved us enough to die for us when we have done nothing to deserve that love. Even though he had no sin, he went to the cross, so we could have forgiveness of sins, something we could never earn. God created us and gave us everything we are and have to be used to glorify him and serve others. He wants us to share all we receive from him, particularly love and forgiveness of sins, so that others can see his love in our lives.

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.