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.*

**Pentecost 7**

Isaiah 66:10-14

When we look at the Christian church on earth, there is a lot that makes us sad. There is wrong teaching and false morality. More than anything else, there is sin—sin in all the members and all the called workers. Even though we mourn over these things, there is so much more in the church that brings us joy. In church we are fed and nourished with “the pure spiritual milk” (1 Peter 2:2). In church we receive the peace of sins forgiven through Word and sacrament. As Isaiah looked forward to the church in the New Testament, he looked with joy over “the wealth of the nations” coming into the church “like a flooding stream.” We are part of the wealth of the nations Isaiah saw. We are some of the Gentiles who come to Jesus and bring their time and energy, as well as their resources, with them to build up his church. The growth and giving of the New Testament church is a source of joy for Isaiah, for us, and for the Lord.

Galatians 6:1-10, 14-16

God’s stewards are uniquely singular, yet profoundly plural. Our giving is a highly personal matter. In fact, many people won’t make a giving pledge because they feel strongly that “My giving is between me and my Lord.” And it is. But the real reason why a Christian gives at all is the great love of Christ that moves us to support God’s mission through the church. We are stewards of what God gives because of our interest in seeing the gospel message proclaimed. We want others to have the blessings of salvation in Christ Jesus. That’s outreach, and that involves many people. Our giving may be very personal, but its effect is very public.

Luke 10:1-12, 16-20

The disciples went out with no funding from their mission board. They went out with no means of income. They went out with nothing more than the clothes on their backs. They went out as “lambs among wolves.” But those lambs also went out with a mission and a promise. The mission was to proclaim the good news about Jesus. The promise was that their Good Shepherd would provide for them. Ask God to send his Holy Spirit so that we might be less concerned about our purse/bag/sandals/stuff, and more trusting of his promise to care for us and more eager to make “Satan fall like lightning from heaven” as we use our time, talents, and treasures to proclaim the good news.

Psalm 66

“Come!” is the invitation which goes out to God’s people. Come and listen to what God has done for us and for our salvation. Come and praise the Lord of our salvation. Let everything we do in life—our words, our actions, our offerings, our service—praise the God who saves.

**Pentecost 8**

Deuteronomy 30:9-14

Wouldn’t it be delightful to have a law that canceled all debts every seven years? That was the law for the people of Israel. But the parents were not practicing or passing on this law (or other laws) to their children. How well do Christian stewardship concepts and practices get passed down to the next generation today? The children at the time of this reading did not know about the law, so they gathered with their parents to hear it read. Moses commanded that they review the laws every seven years (Dt 31:10-13). What if we had a regular training program to teach young stewards? Would that help to pass on to a new generation the principles of Christian stewardship? Perhaps—if the instructors knew what those principles were. As the written law of Moses guided Israel, so God’s Word guides us in learning and practicing principles of stewardship—that is, managing all of life and its resources for God’s purposes. How are your own children learning about stewardship? How can you support teaching a new generation in your congregation?

Colossians 1:1-14

How exciting to write a letter to a church you helped start and rejoice with them over the gospel at work among them! Paul saw the gospel at work in the hearts and lives of the Christians in Colosse. God’s good news brought people to faith in Jesus, who redeemed us with his blood and gives us the forgiveness of sins. Now Paul prays that the believers would “live a life worthy of the Lord and please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work . . . and joyfully giving thanks.” That is a life of a faithful Christian steward. Paul is also praying for you in these words. He wants you to know that every good work you do in Christ is a fruit of faith and everything you do to please God is a source of joy. What good you do for others and for the Lord’s church as a good steward of God’s gifts is evidence of “a life worthy of the Lord.”

Luke 10:25-37

The Samaritan was likely headed somewhere that day and had not allowed for a sizable delay. The Samaritan was likely not a man of great wealth and had not included a medical bill and a hotel bill in his monthly budget. But the opportunity to help his neighbor was there, and he seized it. We confess the times we have not used our time and our treasures (and isn’t that really part of the problem—that we think of them as “ours”?) to help our neighbor, and we rejoice in a Savior who always took the time to help us, even being willing to give up the treasures of heaven to do so. May we, mindless of the “extra expense,” live similarly toward our neighbor.

Psalm 25

There is something we never want God to remember, namely, our sins. There is something we never want Jesus to forget, namely, his great mercy and love. It is the forgiveness that comes from God’s great mercy and love that prepares us to serve God with our lives. What a great honor God has given us that he accepts our gifts of love and our acts of service.

**Pentecost 9**

Genesis 18:1-14

Hospitality is listed in the Bible as a gift of the Spirit. When three visitors seemed to appear out of nowhere to Abraham by the trees of Mamre, he immediately asked Sarah to prepare fresh bread for them. Abraham himself chose a good and tender calf for a servant to butcher and prepare. Abraham served this bread and veal, along with some cheese, to the Lord and the two angels who came with him. The Lord had come to tell Abraham and Sarah that they would have the promised child, the ancestor of the Savior, within a year. Was the meal necessary? No! But God is good in letting us do things for him—and for each other. In using the spiritual gift of hospitality we are not only showing our love to God and others, we may even “entertain angels without knowing it” (Hebrews 13:2).

Colossians 1:21-29

Everyone loves a mystery. Some love to solve puzzles. Some like to figure out “who did it.” Others like to search for clues and analyze the evidence. Imagine a mystery where you had all the clues but still couldn’t figure out the answer. How frustrating! Paul speaks of the gospel as a mystery. Clues to the truth of God’s plan for mankind were revealed throughout history. People trusted in God’s promise. Then, in Paul’s time, the promise came true in the birth, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. “Hidden for ages and generations,” Paul says, “it is now disclosed to the saints”—you and me. Through God’s Word the mystery is revealed. The church, through its ministry of Word and sacrament, manages the gospel message. We might legitimately call it “stewardship of the gospel.” Together we support this stewardship of the gospel, a valuable commodity, with our gifts, our time, and our energy. Through our stewardship of the gospel, the mystery of salvation is revealed to the world.

Luke 10:38-42

We sometimes think that we are the first generation to ever have been busy—the first generation to ever have to make choices concerning the use and stewardship of our time. It’s not true, of course. What Martha wouldn’t have given for the use of a time-saving microwave! Mary surely had many things beckoning to her that day—including God-pleasing service to her Lord. But even that paled in comparison to using her time for the one thing needful—the hearing of her Savior’s Word. Yes, there is a need for council meetings and trimming the church’s hedges and balancing the congregation’s checkbook and organizing the congregation potluck, but the best stewardship of our time still comes when we sit with Mary at Jesus’ feet.

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.

**Pentecost 10**

Genesis 18:20-32

When we think of stewardship of time, we often think of getting into the car, driving to church, and doing some task that needs to be done. The use of our talents almost always necessitates the use of our time. Today Abraham reminds us that taking time to pray is an important part of our stewardship of time. After the Lord told Abraham that he was going to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah, Abraham could have used his time to run to Sodom and tell his nephew Lot to vacate the city immediately. He could have used his time to help Lot move out. Instead he used his time to pray. Through prayer, Abraham learned God was righteous in destroying these evil cities and gracious in sending his angels to rescue Lot. Martin Luther tells us, “I still find it necessary every day to look for time during which I may pray.” In your busy world, find time to pray.

Colossians 2:6-15

What is your greatest treasure? The unbeliever might answer that question with a long list of worldly possessions. As God’s children we answer the question with one word: Jesus. Jesus leads us to give thanks for the manifold spiritual blessings he has poured into our lives. We cherish the forgiveness that is ours through Jesus. We rejoice in the gift of eternal life. We exult in the freedom we have from sin and its eternal death penalty. We celebrate the relationship we have with God through Jesus. What a precious treasure we have in Jesus!

Luke 11:1-13

Throughout Scripture there is a close connection between God’s grace and God’s gifts. It is out of grace—pure, undeserved love—that God’s gifts flow to us. The Greeks knew “grace” as “an action of the king in giving an undeserved gift to one of his subjects for the pure joy of doing it.” In such a show of kindness, the recipient received something beyond his wildest dreams: a gift from the king. Our lesson for today assures us that this is the way God operates. He knows how to give us good gifts—and often. The Lord’s Prayer is answered constantly in our lives as God’s grace abounds. Because God knows our needs and how to give us what we need, we place our trust in him. That trust translates into freedom for us as good stewards to return to God our expressions of thanks for his grace and his gifts.

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.

**Pentecost 11**

Ecclesiastes 1:2; 2:18-26

“You can’t take it with you.” This is a universal truth. To that sentiment we might also add, “And you can’t be certain of what is going to happen to what you leave behind.” Solomon was acutely aware of both of these truths. From a good and gracious God he’d received “wealth, riches, and honor such as no king before or after him” (2 Chronicles 1:12). Solomon however, was brought to the understanding that there is a vast difference between life apart from Christ, which is meaningless, and life with Christ, which is full. God is the giver of all good gifts, and he forgives when we repent of our reliance on things instead of Jesus. Though we can’t take it with us, when Jesus returns, he will take us, together with all believers, to be with him forever.

Colossians 3:1-11

Throughout Paul’s writings he contrasts the state of mankind before the Spirit of God lives in him with the state of mankind after he becomes Spirit-driven. The spiritual person Paul talks about is no longer tossed to and fro by the world, but can chart a steady life course under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. That spiritual person is different. Such a person sees God at work in life every day in every way. Such a person notices the smallest blessings God gives and responds to God’s grace in love with service to the Lord and his church. It takes this kind of vision, “seeing with the heart” instead of the head, to be a willing servant in God’s household, the church. May God’s Spirit grant you “heart eyes” so that you may give generously and serve joyfully in response to his love for you.

Luke 12:13-21

You’ve heard the expression “keeping up with the Joneses”? It’s the age-old adage of outdoing your neighbor when it comes to material possessions. It is so easy to get caught up in materialism. Life on earth is often measured by the abundance of one’s possessions. The Lord Jesus does not condemn riches. Instead he condemns the wrong attitude toward riches, the attitude of greed. When it comes to possessions, remember that all you have comes from God. All you have belongs to him. Give God the proper thanks.

Psalm 34

The sacrifices of God are indeed a broken heart and a crushed spirit. When we present these to God in confession and faith, he gives in return redemption and salvation. The great comfort for believers is that we will not be condemned. In response, we can do no better than sing, “Take my life and let it be consecrated, Lord, to thee.”

**Pentecost 12**

Genesis 15:1-6

Do you remember when you could make a deal with the shake of a hand? Today it seems that contracts are not entered upon without legal documents, attorneys, and notarized statements of intent. God operates differently. He needs no handshake to seal the deal. He needs no lawyers to draw up legal documents. He needs no notary to witness his promise. God promised Abram the blessings of a son from his own body. Abram believed the promise of a biological son and the greater promise of the riches of salvation through the coming Savior. When God makes a promise it is a promise that is kept. God has promised to take care of us as we strive to serve him. We can believe he will do just that.

Hebrews 11:1-3, 8-16

The specific sin that often prevents us from living according to faith is a love for the world and its possessions. Despite our lost battles with the tempter, God forgives our listlessness in combat. By faith we look beyond the temporary treasures of this world, and we see our heavenly inheritance, an eternal home in majesty and glory, prepared by the Lord Jesus himself.

Luke 12:32-40

The order of the words Jesus uses in our gospel reading for today is very deliberate. You would think a person’s beliefs would drive his choices. But Jesus turns it around and says that the choices one makes eventually affects his beliefs. Think about it: Seemingly innocent choices of TV programs or movies with violence, or music with violent lyrics, can develop a belief that this is the way the world operates. The choice of “treasure” changes the “heart.” As stewards of God’s gifts, we can make choices about what is precious to us that can affect what we believe. Picking the wrong treasures can even destroy our faith. But picking treasures that are spiritual and eternal preserve our faith and trust in God. May we always hold the cross of Christ as most precious, and arrange our lives’ priorities around it.

Psalm 33

The earth certainly is full of the goodness of the Lord since by his word he made the heavens, the earth, and all that is in them. What a display of power! That power gives us every reason and confidence to trust him to provide for us. And what is more, since his plans and purposes are the best, we can take him at his word and trust him to provide all we need. We can do so with confidence since the track record of his unfailing love is impeccable. Knowing this gives us every reason to give him our very best.

**Pentecost 13**

Jeremiah 23:23-29

If you argue loudly enough you will win your point. That seems to be the prevalent line of thought in today’s society. Make your point loudly! We hear it in the rising voices of children quarreling or in the angry voices of political dissent. We hear it on picket lines and on the football field. We hear it in our own conversations with the Lord as we attempt to convince him why we can’t give back a generous portion of what he’s given to us. We reason that if we can convince ourselves of this fact, then God will be convinced as well. We speak so loudly that we don’t hear God’s promise of blessings.

Hebrews 12:1-13

The words “discipline” and “disciple” are related. In our society, discipline is often equated with punishment. But the root word for both means “teaching.” As we meditate on our reading for today, it is not hard to catch the idea that discipline teaches something. The runner (or football player or tennis star or gymnastics champion) who is undisciplined will not take the prize. Sometimes discipline is external. The writer to the Hebrews starts there. But eventually, “those who are trained” can begin to practice self-discipline. Christian stewards are by nature not good managers of life and its resources. We learn to respond to God through the teaching of others and by example. Then, later, as we understand God’s grace and his many gifts, we begin to respond from within. May we each strive to become a self-disciplined steward of all of life.

Luke 12:49-53

The Lord Jesus himself warns us that, as his children, we will experience severe trials. Our faith might even be tested to the point of having to choose between submitting to the false beliefs of those who are near and dear to us or to follow the true way of Christ. We will not give up the faith. There is too much to lose: our dear Savior, forgiveness, and everlasting life. Our gracious God, who sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for sin, gives us all that we need for our body and soul.

Psalm 139a

Think of it! No matter where you are, God is there with you. He knows our every step, our every thought! How wonderful this is when it comes to serving him. Even though our best efforts to serve him with time and talents are marred by sin, God graciously forgives and guides us.

**Pentecost 14**

Isaiah 66:18-24

There is a joke that says no gathering of Lutherans is official unless an offering is received. It’s true that we limit our idea of the offering to “that which takes place in the service, usually after the sermon, where we deposit our money in the collection plate.” But in both the Old and New Testament the word “offering” carried deep meaning. An offering was an act of worship. It carried the meaning of relinquishing whatever was given into the control of God, to use as he saw fit. An offering of self was the greatest gift one could bring. On the cross, God in Christ offered himself for us. It was, and still is, the greatest gift. As a steward of God’s gifts, including life itself, what have you offered lately?

Hebrews 12:18-24

Remember the “good old days”? Many people have fond memories for days gone by. Yet those who lived in the “good old days” realize that today’s world actually has its perks, like indoor plumbing, efficient furnaces, modernized farming equipment, and advanced medical technology. Many who remember the “good old days” wouldn’t really want to live them over again. The author of the letter to the Hebrews asks these believers if they really want to return to Judaism with its old covenant of the law. There is no future at Mt. Sinai, no access to God, no eternity with God. Already on earth believers own heaven; already today we possess tomorrow. We are heirs of salvation and all it offers. Let us live in that joy!

Luke 13:22-30

Jesus was the master teacher. What did he teach? He taught the gospel. He taught that there is forgiveness and salvation in him, that God’s love has been shown to all people in him. That was his message and mission. He and he alone is the door to eternal life. Jesus Christ is our greatest treasure. The gifts God gives us to enjoy and use here on earth are transitory. The gift of salvation through Jesus is a gift that lasts forever. May we use what God gives us here on earth to spread his name so that many might enter the narrow door of heaven.

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.

**Pentecost 15**

Proverbs 25:6-7

Humility is to consider the needs of others more important than our own. In the same breath that the Teacher warns us about pride, he hints at God’s gracious promise to the humble. As you imitate your Savior as the servant of all, he lifts you up and bestows on you the greatest honor of all—that you may be like him!

Hebrews 13:1-8

Philadelphia means “the city of brotherly love.” It’s also the Greek word God uses to describe the attitude we are to have for one another. The philadelphia bursts forth into action. That stranger in need? He’s my brother. That man behind bars and that woman in the abusive relationship? My brother and my sister. Philadelphia lusts neither after other people’s bodies nor other people’s money. Instead it sees the person next to me as an opportunity to serve and the money in my pocket as a means to serve. And, most of all, it sees Jesus my Savior with me every step of the way—never changing, never leaving, always faithful, always forgiving, always loving me like his own brother or sister.

Luke 14:1,7-14

Commentators have compared the church to a money sinkhole. “Billions of dollars are spent with no apparent result,” they point out. Perhaps, in a narrow sense, some of the criticism is valid. Our gospel reading for today tells us that the church is a business that doesn’t have a great deal of “return on investment”—at least the kind we can see. What the church gives serves those who cannot repay. We help the poor. We serve the needy. We comfort the sick. We don’t expect much back from them. Above all, we dispense God’s forgiveness freely to all. How can anyone ever repay God for that? Following Christ’s example, the church gives and gives—unconditionally, with no expectation of return. Your support of this ministry through your dollars, time, and service gain little earthly reward, if any. But the eternal reward—that’s something!

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.