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.*

**Lent 4**

Isaiah 12:1-6
What joy and gratitude we feel with the prophet Isaiah as he wraps up the first section of his book of prophecy here. God has rescued us in pure grace from all our sins and from all our fierce
enemies. May God turn our joy and gratitude into action. As we work and rest, as we save and spend—in all we do—may the Lord be our strength, song, and salvation.

1 Corinthians 1:18-25

For a long time, the world’s most knowledgeable people believed that men had more teeth than women. Why? Because, Aristotle had concluded, men have warmer bodies. It turns out that neither of these “facts” was actually true, but nevertheless this false belief was maintained for more than a thousand years. With the benefit of twenty-first century hindsight, it’s easy to laugh at the ridiculous beliefs of the ancients, but in this reading Paul reminds us that our modern insights are no better: human wisdom remains entirely impotent in leading us to salvation. What joy is then found in knowing that “the foolishness of God” is wiser than our wisdom, and that this message of the cross is the power of God.

Luke 15:1-3; 11-32

Jesus’ parable of the prodigal son, told to the Pharisees and teachers of the law, is a poignant reminder to us of God our Father’s unconditional love. As the father in this parable gave his younger son his share of the estate, welcomed him back after his sin-filled adventures, celebrated his son’s becoming “alive” again—we are reminded of the many times that we have felt unforgivable after some of our indiscretions. As children we probably experienced sinful envy towards brothers, sisters, friends, or television celebrities who seemed to receive better treatment, better “toys” than we were given. We can call upon God for help, and he is there for us—unconditionally. We ask ourselves, “How can God ever forgive me for what I have done?” But he will, and does, unconditionally with love! And God is prepared to offer this unconditional love to EVERYONE! As people of God we are to imitate Christ, including showing this kind of unconditional love to others.

Psalm 32

In this Psalm, David repeatedly highlights the joy we find in knowing Christ’s forgiveness and the protection he offers to us. This is so contrary to our instincts of how to take care of ourselves; we assume that by possessing more, we’ll find greater flexibility and freedom. But David emphasizes that it is the Lord who preserves us from trouble while the sorrows of the wicked are many. Let us all remember this when considering how best to use our gifts in the Lord’s service.

**Lent 5**

Isaiah 43:16-21

Why did God make you? To enjoy yourself? To serve yourself? No. God made you, and all Christians together with you, for himself. God formed us for himself so that in all we do, we would proclaim his praise. Jesus died for us so that whether it’s Sunday morning, Tuesday afternoon, or Friday night, in all we do, we would proclaim his praise.

Philippians 3:8-14

On this fifth Sunday in Lent as we approach Palm Sunday and Easter we are strongly reminded of God’s saving power in our lives. We, the sinful ones, are saved from eternal death by faith in the sinless, crucified, and risen Christ of Easter, as promised by God in the Old Testament. All of what we plan for and do comes from God. The Apostle Paul admits that, although he has known Christ and his teachings and tried to follow his ways, he does not consider himself “yet to have taken hold of it.” We can most certainly identify with Paul. We may know what we should do, but often do what we should not. But we can count on the unconditional love and grace of God to help us as we, too, forget “what is behind” and strain “toward what is ahead . . . press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called [us] heavenward in Christ Jesus.” Our focus “heavenward” is a vital part of our life’s priority setting, and planning for and managing our life with this focus will make all the difference for our eternal life.

Luke 20:9-19

Christians often think of stewardship as being about what we give. In light of today’s reading, it’s interesting to consider that the word “steward” was originally used in English to describe the overseer of a house. We so often think of ourselves in the role of “owner,” or on our better days, perhaps “servant,” but in this passage, we see ourselves as nothing more than sharecroppers caring for the land of another. And oh, what poor caretakers we often are, so focused on our own plans and purposes, and not on the work that our Lord has called us to do. Our situation would be as hopeless as the tenants in this parable, but the same God who created us and who saved us from our sin also sanctifies us. God has placed us in our positions of stewardship so that we may gratefully perform the works of service he has prepared in advance for us. May he bless our work as we serve together in his name!

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.

**Palm Sunday**

Zechariah 9:9-10

Could a prophecy made about 25 centuries ago about an event about 20 centuries ago change our lives? Absolutely. As the prophet here sees Jesus coming so humbly to save us, we learn what grace, and our lives under God’s grace, are all about. We’re not here to do whatever we want. Humble faith leads to humble willingness to do whatever God wants.

Philippians 2:5-11

On this Palm Sunday, we ponder the humble entrance of Jesus into Jerusalem, where he was welcomed with praise and respect by those who believed in him, his miracles, and his teachings, but rebuked by the Pharisees. We are told that our attitude “should be the same as that of Christ Jesus” who “made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant . . . humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on the cross!” It is difficult for us to imagine ourselves being able to make the ultimate sacrifice that Jesus made for us, to live the perfect life of Jesus in a world in which corruption is seen daily on television screens and newspapers and heard on radios. Selfishness seems to run rampant and selflessness seems non-existent. How do we begin modeling our lives after that of Christ, our Servant Leader and King? The answers are found in God’s inspired Word and by managing our spiritual life through regularly reading and studying Scripture. We can walk the humble path of life just as Jesus entered Jerusalem on a colt on Palm Sunday so many years ago.

Luke 19:28-40

In a busy church it’s easy to think of stewardship as a decision-driven, active process. You may be coordinating a festival, canvassing a neighborhood, or even just putting money in the offering plate, but it’s often something you’ve chosen to do yourself. In this passage we’re reminded of a more passive form of stewardship: being willing to do what must be done at the time it’s needed. The owner of the donkey isn’t named in Scripture and didn’t even have the satisfaction of having Jesus make a request of him personally, but he also knew that this was needed for the Lord’s work. And so often our work is the same. So often this is the way opportunities present themselves: not as opportunities to indulge ourselves by performing the work we’d most like to do, but as a chance to demonstrate true service by doing the work that most needs to be done.

Psalm 24

What makes something “ours”? Is it because it was handed down to us from our ancestors or because we received it after an investment of sweat and labor? David reminds us that “The earth is the Lord’s, and everything in it,” that the only one who can truly claim ownership of anything in this world is the one who “founded it upon the seas and established it upon the waters.” As we handle the possessions in our care, may we always remember who has entrusted them to us!

**Maundy Thursday**

Exodus 12:1-14

One of the interesting details of the celebration of the first Passover was the requirement for the children of Israel to give the best and finest of their lambs for slaughter. This was another one of those word pictures the Lord shared to remind the Israelites that he intended to give nothing but the best and finest for the sins of all mankind, namely his Son. What a wonderful example God and the Israelites have given us as we set our giving priorities. May the offerings we give to our God come from gracious hearts that intend to give only the best and finest in gratitude for the forgiveness of sins, peace with God, and eternal life.

Hebrews 10:15-25

It’s very easy to imagine religion as a purely individual enterprise. Certainly we believe in our own hearts, not another’s, just as we were baptized individually and will someday rise to stand before God individually. But God takes great pains to remind us of the importance of our continued cooperation with one another. Consider that God’s word came to each of us through the activity of other believers and that God has placed us here to continue to spread the gospel to others. May God move us to keep this focus on serving him as we serve one another through our words, actions, time, talent, and treasures!

Luke 22:7-20

There’s a certain dramatic irony to the way today’s familiar reading begins as Jesus sends Peter and John to make preparations for the Passover. These preparations certainly would not have been easy. If you think Bethlehem was busy during Augustus’ census, just imagine finding yourself in the capital city during the holiday season. Still, it doesn’t take a great deal of imagination to visualize how gung-ho these two must have been to take on this task when they asked Jesus, “Where do you want us to prepare for it?” And here comes the twist: Jesus has already made preparations for them, so that they can make preparations for him. The preparations didn’t stop there. God established the Passover festival as a continuing reminder of how he guards his people and to provide a context for the ultimate sacrifice Jesus was preparing to make just a few hours later. Through all human history, God has shaped events to point toward Christ’s crucifixion and, at the same time, has also created opportunities for us to serve in his name.

**Good Friday**

Isaiah 52:13-53:12

In the workplace there are positions of glory and then there are other less glamorous types of work. A good CEO may dine with the president or make the cover of BusinessWeek; a bad CEO may make the magazine cover for less positive reasons and, depending on the extent of his inadequacy, may soon find himself the object of public scorn. A good janitor, however, will often only gain the respect of peers, and a bad janitor will pass through the workplace with little recognition at all. So how unlikely would it be to see a CEO taking the fall for the actions of the janitor? What a shock it is for us, then, to find our Lord in such a position. Here we are, poor stewards, seeing our landlord stricken and afflicted for our mismanagement of his estate. But praise God that he was, for by his punishment we have peace and by his wounds we are healed.

Hebrews 4:14-16; 5:7-9

Today we come to God’s house with hearts filled with remorse and sadness and at the same time we know this Sunday morning we will come with hearts filled with joy. Why the remorse? We know what our sins required Jesus to experience that final day of his life. Why the joy? We know that because Jesus went to that cross and rose triumphantly from the grave, God the Father has accepted the payment Jesus made “once and for all.” Bringing our offerings to church every time a service is held is a very vivid way in which we say “Thank you, Jesus. Thank you for being our perfect High Priest. Thank you for defeating our three arch enemies: sin, death, and the devil.”

John 19:17-30

He didn’t give us a tenth of what he had. God did not have 10 sons from whom he gave one to the world for its salvation. What motivates to such generous giving? It is love. Scripture says, “God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son.” God’s love for us in turn creates a responsive love in us which expresses itself in many wonderful ways. Some people will be tempted to say, “To give all or even a large amount is not reasonable.” Whoever said that love was reasonable? Love does extravagant things. God has proven his love for you. He has proven himself trustworthy. He has “gone all out” for you. Can you respond in like measure? His will for you is, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.” Look to him. Expect him to help you respond, for “he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.”

Psalm 22

The words of this psalm are so familiar on Good Friday, from the obvious foreshadowing of Christ’s crucifixion to the establishment of the words he later said on the cross. But this psalm also highlights the role that evangelism plays as a response to our faith in Christ. We naturally tell one another of what Christ has done for us until all the ends of the earth remember and turn to the Lord. Lord, please support us and guide us as we look for ways to share the good news with others who have not heard it.

**Easter Dawn**

Isaiah 12:1-6 (also see the above Lent 4 article on this reading)

Isaiah foresaw the impact of Easter on God’s people. He foresaw this time of joy, thanksgiving, and praise that is expressed in our Easter decorations, liturgy, songs, and offerings. He foresaw the fulfillment of all prophecies of the Messiah. This Easter weekend we are celebrating just as Isaiah prophesied.

1 Corinthians 15:51-57

Jesus’ resurrection is what compels each of us to respond with our time, talents, and treasures to support the spread of the Easter message to the world. Jesus’ resurrection assures us the sting of death, namely sin, is only a passing thing. Today we celebrate our Savior’s victory over sin, death, and the devil. Death is simply the passageway we must travel to enter the new heaven and earth Jesus has prepared for us.

John 20:1-18

Imagine the grief of Mary Magdalene beginning on Good Friday, the day of Christ’s earthly death on the cross, and continuing through this Easter morning when she discovered his empty tomb. Mary Magdalene, chosen to be one of those to find the tomb empty, saw the resurrected Jesus. Can you imagine yourself in that situation: empty tomb, angels, Christ risen? She might have floated awestruck to tell the disciples the news: “I have seen the Lord!” Mary Magdalene, an ordinary woman who loved her Lord and Savior, was given a special part to play in the resurrection story. What do you do as a result of being privileged to experience through God’s Word what she experienced? As a steward of the gospel message you are an ambassador for Christ. Put yourself in her place, in the place of one of the disciples who heard her speak. Do this every day, as though the first Easter is happening again 365 times each year. Live as the Easter person that God created you to be!

Psalm 30

How did the temple in Jerusalem come to be? God made the mountain on which it stood and every atom of material that went into its construction, but God used it as an opportunity for his people to contribute their talents and treasures. God presents each of us with daily opportunities to use our gifts and abilities in his service whether it’s a matter of telling a friend about Jesus, contributing to a church need, or volunteering to support a congregational event. Thank you, Lord, for giving us both the opportunity and ability to serve you in our lives.

**Easter**

Exodus 15:1-11

Sometimes it’s easy to wish for God to give us a visible example of his providence, as the Hebrews saw when the Red Sea swallowed up the chariots of Egypt—a bold, obvious example of his care that removes any doubt of his involvement. But, of course, God doesn’t always work through great calamity, but sometimes through silence and safety, and often through the actions of others. May God provide us with ample opportunities to reflect his light in the lives of others as we live in his service!

1 Corinthians 15:1-11

The Apostle Paul had quite a story to reveal about himself. The resurrected Christ appeared to him, brought him to faith, and called him to be an apostle. His response? “By the grace of God I am what I am.” So also, by the grace of God, you are what you are. You may not have the dramatic story of Paul or the call to be an apostle, but you do have the grace of God with you. Revel in that grace, and work hard at your vocation to the glory of your resurrected Lord.

Luke 24:1-12

Very rarely is emptiness seen as a positive attribute. An empty bank account, an empty gas tank, an empty cradle, an empty seat at the table—they’re all reminders of our limitations and the losses we are doomed to experience. An unexpected emptiness is often even worse. The women who came to prepare Jesus’ body that Easter Sunday had experienced such a sudden loss: their Jesus, who had seemed so beloved by everyone just a week earlier, had suffered such a humiliating, public death. They and the disciples found themselves practicing a type of stewardship they had never expected: collecting their Messiah’s body and preparing it for burial. They had experienced so much emptiness already that they were shocked to experience a sudden, different, positive emptiness: he had risen indeed! The emptiness of the tomb replaced their empty hopes with hopefulness and their empty works with the fulfilling task of telling everyone that he has risen! When we see that empty tomb, we no longer see a great loss, but a great gain: salvation has been won, and we have been made right with God!

Psalm 118:14-24

On this joyous Easter Day we rejoice at the resurrection of Christ after his death on the cross. The message of Psalm 118 relates the Old Testament symbolic image that the “stone the builders rejected has become the capstone.” The gospels use this image to symbolize the humility and death of our Savior, Jesus, becoming the foundation “stone” of our Christian faith. The Easter season is one of setting priorities, of reflecting upon the life, death, resurrection and “new life” of Christ. We can find great strength and joy in knowing that Jesus loved us enough to pay the ultimate sacrifice for our sinfulness. No further sacrifice needs to be made. We are now freed from “payback” service. We can live our lives using all the gifts God gives, freely giving and serving. There is no worry that God will someday demand something unexpected of us. His resurrection guarantees it.

**Easter 2**

Acts 5:12, 17-32

On this second Sunday of Easter, the resurrection of Jesus from death is fresh in our minds. We continue to rejoice, sing, and give thanks to God for his unconditional love through the supreme sacrifice of his Son for our sins. The Easter season is about setting priorities—KEEPING CHRIST FIRST in our lives! “We must obey God rather than men!” In Acts 5:29, Peter and the other apostles expressed this priority even under threatening circumstances as they appeared before the Sanhedrin (“the full assembly of the elders of Israel”). The apostles witnessed to these high officials that Christ died so that we could live eternally with him. As witnesses to the truth, we are caretakers of the gospel message. Managing the proclamation of that message is the work of the church and its people. Through good stewardship of the gifts God gives personally and to the church, the gospel message is proclaimed.

Revelation 1:4-18

The Son of Man told the apostle John, “Do not be afraid . . . I was dead, and behold I am alive for ever and ever!” These comforting words from the Son of Man, our Savior Jesus Christ, are also intended for us today: “Do not be afraid . . . I am the Living One.” This means we do not have to be afraid to stand up for God at the work place, to give generously, or to teach his Word to others, because our all-powerful God lives and reigns eternally!

John 20:19-31

Are you a doubting Thomas? God lets us know that whoever sows generously will reap generously (2 Corinthians 9:6). A doubting Thomas is one who wants to see the reaping first before he sows. Jesus says, “Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”

Psalm 16

As we continue to bask in the joy of Christ’s resurrection, these words encourage us to rejoice in the presence of God, who is our safe harbor, and the blessings he freely gives us. While this psalm, according to the Apostles Peter and Paul, applies directly to Jesus and reflects his heart, we can take confidence in God’s safekeeping throughout our lives and even to the point of resurrection from the dead. Let us be content and focused as we use God’s resources for his mission!

**Easter 3**

Acts 9:1-20

On this third Sunday of Easter we continue to reflect upon the death and resurrection of Christ for us. This is our highest priority in life. So many times we look in the mirror and wonder how God could forgive our every weakness, our every sin. We see many blemishes inside and out. Like Saul in the story on the road to Damascus, we need to become blind in order to see what God has in mind for us as his instruments, his disciples. Other people in our lives have influence on the discovery of our gifts and talents and how we can use them in service to our loving God. Ananias was asked by God in a vision to place his hands on Saul and heal him, because Saul was to be God’s “chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel.” We, like Saul (Paul), are to see more with the heart than with the head. We are to have our eyes open in a new way to see God’s blessings and what he has done for us. Only then can we commit to a life of service as witnesses of Christ’s sacrifice for us.

Revelation 5:11-14

When the glory of the Lamb was on display, what else could the elders do but fall down and worship? For you and me, the glory of the Lamb is always on display in his powerful Word. How else can we respond, but to fall down before his merciful throne in worship—not only with our lips, but also with our actions and our trust? Let us shower our Lord with a worship that is due his name.

John 21:1-14

“Throw your net on the right side of the boat and you will find some.” Are you ready to trust the Lord’s direction? He tells you that he loves a cheerful giver and to give according to your income. When you throw your net according to the Lord’s direction, you too will receive blessings.

Psalm 67

The Second Petition of the Lord’s Prayer has often been called the “mission petition.” When Christians pray, “your kingdom come,” they ask that God’s gracious rule will enter the hearts of people everywhere. These words could be called the “mission petition of the Psalms,” for we pray that our Savior, who has richly blessed us, will use us to share his gracious spiritual and material blessings with people at home and around the globe. To that end, Father, help us!

**Easter 4**

Acts 13:15, 16a, 26-33

In condemning Jesus, the rulers of Jerusalem were still being used to carry out God’s will. It’s very reassuring, is it not, that despite your sins against the Lord, he is still carrying out his plans for you? But is this the way you want his will to be carried out? I think not. Lord, move me to give according to your will and according to my means so that my deeds are working in conformity with your will.

Revelation 7:9-17

Our time on earth is described as a great tribulation, but we look forward to the day when God will wipe away every tear from our eyes. As Satan works hard to put tribulations on God’s elect, let us pray for each other, asking Christ to work out all things so that we may step out of the great tribulation and into the throne room of the Lamb wearing the white robes he gives us and holding the palm branches of victory.

John 10:22-30

The fourth Sunday of Easter our thoughts travel to the spring season, a time when we are keenly aware of the sounds around us: the birds, the outdoor activities of our neighbors, the lawn mowers and weed-eater. We listen with joy and a renewed energy, brought partly by the sunlight, as the days grow longer. We, like sheep, also need to listen to God’s voice directing our life. Because we are his sheep, we have eternal life with him. In the Gospel lesson today, Jesus tells the Jews gathered around him that he cares for his sheep, and that, in fact, “I and the Father are one.” The Jews listened, but did not believe, and Jesus left them. But we, as his sheep, trust in the Shepherd to provide for all our needs. God’s care means that we can live confidently, responding to God with acts of service and thanksgiving and knowing we will lack nothing. What a blessing! What a pleasure to serve in his name!

Psalm 23

If it’s true—and it is—that “the LORD is my shepherd, I shall not be in want,” then why do I complain, feel greedy or jealous, worship things, and use people to get more stuff? My Old Adam, that’s why, which willingly follows Satan’s temptations and the world’s love of money. Forgive me Jesus, restore my soul, and help me follow the paths of your righteousness all my days until I dwell in your house forever. Until then, use me to share your shepherding love with as many people as possible!

**Easter 5**

Acts 13:44-52

Joy and opposition. Paul experienced this throughout his ministry. And which won out? Joy! You have the same struggle. So many things sit in opposition to a giving heart. What, though, can overcome this opposition? Joy! You have been given eternal life through faith in Christ Jesus. God is using you to give others that very same gift. May the joy of knowing salvation and knowing that God is using you to bring salvation to others move you to face any opposition and be victorious in Christ.

Revelation 21:1-6

What are you more invested in, that which is temporary or that which is eternal? Consider what the Lord is saying about “a new heaven and a new earth.” While investing in the temporary is not wrong, keep in mind it is just that: temporary. Continue to look forward to the “new heaven” the Lord has prepared for his people. May our investment of time, talent, and treasure reflect our anticipation.

John 13:31-35

The fifth Sunday of Easter reading from John 13 brings us a message—“Love one another”—that we can find in today’s world repeated on pass-it-on cards, mugs, greeting cards, wall hangings, and figurines. The commercialism of this statement from Jesus found here and in other books of the Bible might water down the original message, or desensitize people to this “commandment.” As we look more closely at this text, we also note the rest of this “new commandment”: “As I have loved you, so you must love one another. All men will know that you are my disciples if you love one another.” Modeling Christ-like love is how we, as his disciples, are to live our lives. Love is always giving and shows itself in unconditional acts of service. We “spend ourselves” for God and his church. We can love and serve because we are children of the Heavenly Father, who loved us so much that he sacrificed his only Son for our sins.

Psalm 145

While this is a general psalm of praise, each verse begins with the consecutive letters of the Hebrew alphabet. After reading and pondering its truths, we could sing, using the familiar school jingle, “A, B, C, D, E, F, G, God has done so much for me!” Do we always realize that and confess it with childlike faith? For those times we haven’t, Lord, forgive us and renew us by your Spirit so that we praise you with all we are and have for making, rescuing, and preserving us!