

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.*

**Transfiguration**

Exodus 34:29-35

Miracles played a regular role in the life and times of some of those we meet in Scripture. Moses’ glowing face is a classic example of God using a miracle to remind the people of Israel of just who they were dealing with. The miracle of Jesus’ transfiguration is another example of God reminding people who ultimately is in charge. Every time we confess ours sins and are assured they are forgiven we have experienced the miracle of God’s forgiveness even though we are sinful, covetous, self-focused people. What is even more miraculous is the same God who forgives our sins compels us to live for him every day. We come to God’s house to be forgiven and to share a portion of our worldly wealth, so that the message of forgiveness can continue to be proclaimed.

2 Corinthians 4:3-6

The striking tragedy in the drama between Creator and created, is that the ones who were made have no earthly idea about the careful planning, loving craftsmanship, and devoted protection God has freely given them. Only when Jesus “shows up” through means of grace, does the first light of understanding begin to dawn in their hearts. “God really loves me.” “He’s accomplished the unthinkable for me.” “He met every righteous demand for me.” And now, one of the loveliest results of this incredible truth? The created suddenly thrill to serve their Creator!

Luke 9:28 36

Build a shelter for the God of the universe and for two men who already live in eternal paradise? Peter’s idea came from a sleepy head. We know what that’s like, don’t we? Sometimes we get harebrained ideas about how our church could do ministry. Now, it’s great to have ideas! But as we think them through, something important should emerge: What does this idea do for helping people listen to God’s Son? That, after all, is the Father’s main purpose for our ministry!

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 3:12-4:2

It’s so easy to question everything, from the actions we see to the motives of the people with whom we interact—and for good reason. As George Burns once said, “The most important thing is sincerity. If you can fake that you’ve got it made.” Thankfully, as Paul reminds us, God works through the Holy Spirit to take away our veil of distrust. And this serves as an effective reminder to us so that as we proclaim God’s mercy to an unbelieving world we will not also be tempted to resort to deception.

**Ash Wednesday**

Isaiah 59:12 20

God’s Jewish people were stewards of the truth, but they had dropped it in the dirt; they were not living by his truths, and their sins were only piling up. The Lord Jehovah, however, never fails in stewarding his truth. He made sure sin would be dealt with correctly and fully. He came himself to do it! Because of his faithfulness, the Scriptures’ truths have gone into all the world, even far into the West, and we have learned to fear and love and trust him. It is his faithfulness that inspires us to faithfully steward his truths everywhere.

2 Corinthians 5:20b-6:2

At this moment in history the Lord is giving us the opportunity to share with others locally and far beyond our zip code the good news that Jesus went up to Jerusalem to be this world’s Savior. The offerings we place into our offering plate today are one way we can make sure the good news of our Savior is delivered in our locality but also throughout the world through the ministry of our Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod.

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. All of 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 that 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*

Revelation 3:14-22

There are times in life where we must make up our mind to decide between extreme choices, but so often we avoid making the decision and instead settle for delaying, or maybe pursuing a customized choice that suits our desires exactly. We can be tempted to see this middle road as a suitable way to avoid “extreme” behavior, especially when we compare ourselves to the unbelieving world. John reminds us of the danger this presents and how this complacency can also rob us of the clarity to recognize our spiritual need. Let us ever more passionately pursue finding full satisfaction through Christ.

**Lent 1**

Deuteronomy 26:5-10

During this season of Lent, we are reminded of the “mighty hand” and “outstretched arm” of God in our lives. We may have been among those who have lost our job because of downsizing, or who have struggled with the inability to live a “normal” life because of injury or disease, or who have experienced neglect or abuse in our personal relationships. It is difficult for us, just as it was difficult for those who were led by Moses out of Egypt, to focus on the “miraculous signs and wonders” that come our way every day, keeping us filled with spiritual food. God weaves his love, healing hope, and care into our lives. All that we are and have and will be comes to us from God. During Lent we concentrate upon the risen Christ of Easter, firstfruit of God given for us with unconditional love. Just as God has given us this precious gift, we are privileged to bring our firstfruit gifts to him in the forms of our time, talent, and treasure.

Romans 10:8b-13

Heart and mouth go together in the Christian. It has never been the end of faith to simply know Jesus died for sinners. When you believe he died for you, it’s only natural to call to him. Are you stewarding your prayer time too? To have the one called Jehovah, the great I Am, on your side—the remover of sins, giver of hope, promise of paradise—it makes you long to have whatever he is willing to give you. A daily prayer that makes so much sense is, “Lord Jesus, forgive all my sins!” How wonderful his assurance: You will never be disappointed by looking to me!

Luke 4:1-13

It’s not a fair fight when you really look at the daily struggle between humankind and Satan’s assaults. His temptations run so parallel to our own evil desires and fleshly demands that we can confuse our sinful disobedience for perfectly natural requests. Thank God for our Substitute! In love, Jesus took the fight to Satan, conquering his wicked attempts with God’s powerful truth. And now God’s truth says it’s still an unfair fight. When we resist the devil using God’s Word, our enemy doesn’t stand a chance! People free from Satan are people free to make God’s Word their priority. That’s just good, plain, thankful, stewardship modeled after our Savior himself!

Psalm 91

The greatest heroes of our time are superheroes: fictional figures who can overcome the evil forces and extreme powers that overtake ordinary folks. But consider also the role of the sidekicks who often have no powers of their own but are granted access to protection and adventure simply through their affiliation with the powerful. God is, of course, more than just a mere comic book creation, but it’s interesting to place ourselves in the shoes of the psalmist, considering the marvelous behavior of a bird of prey caring for its young. This caring is not limited to mere protection, or even guarding us from fear; God also provides us with the opportunity to join in the action, to go out and proclaim his good news to all who will hear. Let us pray that we will make wise use of these opportunities he grants us.

**Lent 2**

Jeremiah 26:8-15 or Luke 13:31-35

Today’s Old Testament and Gospel readings share with us the boldness of the prophet Jeremiah and our Savior. It is evident that nothing was going to derail Jeremiah or Jesus from accomplishing the work each was called to do. May all of us emulate Jeremiah and Jesus in our own lives as Christians. May the Lord compel us to let nothing take our focus off our main purpose in life, which is summed up quite well by our synod’s theme: “Christ’s Love, Our Calling.” May the way we manage our lives, our finances, and our time reveal that Jesus has a grip on us.

Philippians 3:17—4:1

On this second Sunday in Lent, the message of Scripture is sadly and even painfully clear. In our world today—with mass media, super-powered communication devices, instant news flashes of crises occurring in every corner of the earth—we are living in the Information Age. We reflect upon the daily crises that bombard our television and computer screens. We see the seemingly hopeless situations in which some men, women, and children are placed and ask ourselves “Why?” We look at the leadership under which these crises occur—in foreign countries, in our country, in our towns, and in our families. With a touch on the Internet, we can communicate with people we will never meet and “listen” to their life stories. We may not “hear” the true pain and hopelessness they may feel. We may not “hear” that they have not yet realized that “their mind is on earthly things” or that “many live as enemies of the cross of Christ.” Do we use our God-given time to really listen? Do we take the time to share that “we eagerly await a Savior,” that we believe in the risen Christ of Easter? Do we “stand firm in the Lord?”

Psalms 42-43

Malnourished bodies beg for nutritional attention—so do thirsty souls! But the only attention that quenches our spiritual craving is the living water of God’s holy Word. His “light and truth” of forgiveness in Jesus are the only answers to the natural darkness in our souls and the daily deceptions in our hearts. So, our only true hope rests in Jesus’ sacrifice for our sin. And God’s singular hope is that we respond the same way anyone would respond when someone is kind enough to offer them a drink. Our joy-filled, firstfruit gifts of love, are the thank yous he thrills to see.

**Lent 3**

Exodus 3:1-8b, 10-15

To come near God, we learn with Moses, is to stand on holy ground. What grace that we can even approach God at all, in Christ! Note in the lesson what the result will be when God single-handedly rescues his people of old: They will return to God to worship him. May we likewise worship our holy God by all we think, say, and do in response to his grace.

1 Corinthians 10:1-13

On this third Sunday in Lent we remember a story from Moses’ time that also applies today. How are we to live our lives? By what example? That of our peers, our friends, our coworkers, our family, our parents? We are to follow Christ’s example. Do we? Although we may have eaten the “spiritual food and drank the same spiritual drink” as our forefathers and have experienced drinking from the “spiritual rock” that is Christ, we are, nevertheless, sinners, just as the people led by Moses. They were warned not to be idolaters, not to commit sexual immorality, not to test the Lord, and not to grumble—warnings that we also often ignore.

How blessed we are, how cared for! As we remain focused on Christ as our Savior, we have the promise that “God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear.” God gives us everything we need, even the resources to make wise decisions, and when we don’t, a “way out” to again “stand firm” and remain faithful in him. How can we thank him for these generous, unconditional gifts of love?

Luke 13:1-9

In the aftermath of a major tragedy, survivors often find themselves trying to find answers to questions like “How could this happen?”, “What do I do now?”, or the more fundamental “Why me?” Christians who have placed their trust in today’s popular “success theologies” may feel like they’ve received a sucker punch to the gut, as they’re now forced to ask, “Is my sin greater than that of those around me?” In this text, Jesus responds with a resounding “I tell you, no!” and then reminds the rest of us that “unless you repent, you too will all perish.” With his death on the cross, Christ paid the price for sin once and for all, and now lives to nurture and prune our faith. Although life’s hardships and tragedies remain, we may rest securely knowing that we are at peace with God.

Psalm 38

Repentance is such a necessary Lenten theme. At the heart of our repentance is a confident trust in God’s mercy. Being sorry for sorry’s sake *isn’t* repentance. Promising to amend our sinful failure *isn’t* repentance either. Repentance *is* acknowledging our sin before a holy God, but then completely relying on his love to make amends for us. It was Jesus’ life of perfection and his divine rejection that makes us right with our God. Our gifts of love come too late in this relationship to impress God or earn his favor. Our gifts of love come at the very end in grateful recognition of our Lord’s amazing mercy!

*Christian Worship: Supplement*

Numbers 16:23-40

Stewardship discussions often focus purely on financial giving, though the concept properly includes all the areas where Christians are called to care for what God has entrusted to us. But what constitutes good stewardship when it comes to caring for man-made artifacts, especially if they don’t reflect our contemporary values? There are two obvious extremes: one treats the work of our ancestors as monuments that must be maintained in perpetuity, while the other treats all history as disposable. God himself provides a third option: to keep these items around as reminders of the sins of our past that must not be repeated. Our focus must never be on our own creations, but on the Creator who made us. Let us remember that the best use of the things we find surrounding us is to keep our attention directed at God.

**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 true. 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.

*Christian Worship: Supplement*

Judges 10:6-16

The world is full of terrible financial advice: get-rich schemes, sure-thing penny stocks, insider trading, tax evasion, embezzlement. These snares can be alluring because we only hear about them during the times when they seem to work! If a wealthy woman tells us a stock tip, we may believe her; if we hear it from a homeless man, we probably won’t. If a coworker tells us about a tax scheme they learned about, we may accept their word; if it’s someone we’re visiting in prison, we probably won’t. The book of Judges records a litany of occasions where the Israelites turn away from God during their times of prosperity but turn back once they start to experience the consequences of their actions. Let us remain thankful that we have a God who listens to our cries of repentance even when we should have known better than to turn away!

**Lent 5**

Isaiah 43:16-21

The LORD’s church in the Old Testament could have been bitter about being slaves for almost 400 years. The LORD, however, wants them to forget the suffering of the past and think of how he saved them from an advancing Egyptian army and from impending death. He did it by dividing the Red Sea for them to pass and then letting it swallow up their enemies. That was only the beginning. Much later, the Jesus came to save them from the punishment of damnation their sins deserved. Instead of bitterness for past injustices, there were plenty of reasons to praise the Lord. Today, no matter how dark the road we have traveled on, the same God who delivered the Israelites and who promised them a Savior, is the God who blesses us with grace multiplied by grace. He is our Savior. What a reason to worship and praise him from our hearts with our time, talents, and financial gifts.

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 priorities. 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!

*Christian Worship: Supplement*

Hebrews 12:1-3

Today we celebrate how Jesus rode into Jerusalem and began his difficult journey to the cross. Who can imagine how difficult it was for God, who hates sin, to take on our sins and be damned for them? By comparison the journey we have in life may be difficult, but it certainly is not as painful or difficult as the path Jesus walked in our behalf. If your path is especially difficult, find relief by focusing on Jesus and his love for you. Jesus didn’t quit or complain. As we focus on Jesus’ gracious love for us, we will not want to quit or complain either. Of course, the opposite of quitting and complaining is standing firm in the true faith and finding quality time to worship and praise him.

**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 could 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.

Psalm 116

The pattern of our relationship with God is this: The Lord gives, and we respond with thankfulness. Because he has turned his ear to us, we will call on his name forever! What great joy can be found in giving back. God blesses us again and again. He provides for our material needs as well as rescuing our souls. In response to his great blessings we thankfully call on his name, sing his praises, and offer a portion of that with which he has blessed us.

*Christian Worship: Supplement*

Jeremiah 31:31-34

Jeremiah speaks of a new covenant. His prophecy is fulfilled when Jesus institutes the Lord’s Supper, which replaces the Passover and the old covenant. In the old covenant, animals were slaughtered, blood was shed. These sacrifices prepared his people to accept the fact that the wages of sin is death, but a loving God accepts a substitute. It is possible for an innocent victim to take the wrath of God for your sins. These sacrifices prepared God’s people to look forward to the Messiah who would be the sacrifice. What a blessing today to be able to receive Jesus’ real body and blood and the forgiveness of sins that the old covenant could only picture. What a reason for us to receive the sacrament frequently and with joy.

**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.

*Christian Worship: Supplement*

Galatians 3:10-13

All religions of the world have something in common. All try to answer the question, “How can an individual have peace with their god as they know them?” All, except those who faithfully accept the teachings of Scripture, answer that question with works designed to win enough favor to be accepted. Only Christians who faithfully follow and confess the Bible trust in the fact that the true God did everything necessary to have peace with him. Our works would be useless because they don’t meet the requirements necessary to have peace with God. That requisite is absolute holiness. How can we have that holiness? God punished Jesus for us and credited Christ’s holiness to our account. Through faith it becomes ours personally. Today we celebrate the fact that Jesus was our substitute on the cross. We rejoice that he did everything necessary, so that we don’t have to add even a little bit to our salvation. How beautiful are the words, “It is finished,” or “paid in full”! This is what is good about Good Friday.

**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 Day**

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!

*Christian Worship: Supplement*

2 Peter 1:16-21

Peter’s testimony was certain because he was an eyewitness. He had seen the glory of God in Christ on the mountain. He had seen the glory of life from death when Jesus appeared to his disciples in the locked house. What the Bible tells us is to be believed. It is true. Here we have the basis and foundation for Christian faith. All people believe certain things about God, things about who he is, what his relationship is to us, why we are here, etc. For most, there is no solid basis for what they believe. On the other hand, we Christians have a solid basis for our faith. It is God’s Word as found in the Holy Scripture. What a good reason to love that Word, believe that Word and, if necessary, die rather than deny the truths it offers us. What a reason for us to use our money wisely so God’s Word can be spread around the globe to every nation, language, and people.