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 Years B and 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.*

**Reformation**

Jeremiah 18:1-11

“Like clay in the hand of the potter, so are you in my hand.” God is the potter. You are the clay. “We are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.” God made us for a purpose: to offer our bodies as living sacrifices to him—joyfully and thankfully obeying his commandments—proclaiming his Word, glorifying him with our actions, and showing his love to those around us. But as far as clay pots are concerned we are marred. Every year at this time we are reminded of God’s grace given to us through the Lutheran Reformation. Every year we are reminded to reform our hearts and lives. Just as a potter can reform clay into a new jar, so God graciously reforms us. He sends messengers who proclaim his Word: “turn from your evil ways, each one of you, and reform your ways and actions.” Through Scripture, by grace, through faith in Christ’s atoning sacrifice, he leads us to repentance, reforms our ways and actions, and saves us from disaster.

Revelation 14:6,7

Do we ever connect our offerings with the word “eternal?” How long will my car last? How long

can I go before I have to replace the roof? My oven is about ready to fail—how long can I nurse it along? The money in our bank accounts and the things we own are far from eternal. The stock market dips and our money melts away. Our possessions in the garage and kitchen rust, leak, and eventually fall apart. Contrast that with the lasting effect our offerings have. When we share from the gifts that we possess, it enables pastors, teachers, and missionaries to proclaim the eternal gospel throughout the world. Can any other opportunity offer such a great return on our investment?

Mark 13:5-11

Praise the Lord that he has compelled us to believe that the Bible is the whole truth and nothing but the truth. Even though we live in a world that does its best to convince us to believe we have a lot to worry about, we know that wars, national conflicts, earthquakes, and famines are simply the birth pains of this world as it waits for its day of destruction. Earthly blessings are temporary. Through faith in Jesus we can confidently look forward to the day he will deliver us from this vale of tears and take us to a perfect heavenly kingdom. Meanwhile we will focus on what’s important, that our congregations and our church body have adequate resources to preach the gospel to as many nations as possible so that many other people may still be saved.

**Last Judgment**

Malachi 4:1,2

The last judgment is something unbelievers don’t like to discuss very much. It promises to shake the very foundation of their lives as all that “stuff” in which they have placed their trust will be destroyed in the fire. Considering this, the temptation is to “eat, drink, and be merry” because tomorrow everything could be destroyed. Praise the Lord for compelling us, his people, to “revere” his name. The “stuff” of this world is not something in which we place our trust. Instead we are to manage it during our life to God’s glory. May the way we manage our “stuff” reveal people as joyful and carefree as a calf leaping in the spring, since we are awaiting our joyful entrance into heaven.

Hebrews 9:24-28

“Once for all” Christ did “away with sin by the sacrifice of himself . . . and he will appear a second time . . . to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him.” These words bring joy to our hearts. We can live without fear. Death is scary, but the verdict is certain: salvation to those who are waiting for Christ. This judgment frees us up to do great things for our Lord and Savior. Instead of spending all our time and energy and wealth trying to atone for our sins, we spend our time, our energy, and our wealth proclaiming his praise. We live for him who died for us. We live for him who now sits in God’s presence in heaven.

John 5:19-24

The father/son relationship is pretty special, especially when that son is the firstborn. Dad holds his little boy in his arms and sees that the family name lives on. As time goes on, dad teaches his son to do all kinds of things—play catch, change the oil on the car, basic home maintenance. The boy grows up, and everyone pays him the highest compliment: “He looks just like his father.” The longer we live in Christ, we honor our Father and his one and only Son, and begin to look more and more like him! Our lives here on earth are a testament to the life that Jesus has given to us. The way we use every gift we possess shows the connection we have with our Father, and serves as a precursor to the greatest gift of all—eternal life with him in heaven.

**Saints Triumphant**

Daniel 12:1-3

Whether we realize it or not, we are among those who “shine like the brightness of the heavens” and “like the stars for ever and ever.”We know what is going to happen when the end of this world comes. We are going to be among those whose name is written in the Book of Life, the registry of heaven. May the way we manage our money, our family, our business, and anything else we do in life reveal to those around us that we are the stars Daniel is talking about in our Old Testament lesson.

Hebrews 10:11-18

Lift your eyes heavenward! The saints triumphant stand before the throne of God worshiping their Savior. They are filled with joy for “by one sacrifice he [Christ] has made perfect forever those who are being made holy.” Through Christ’s sacrifice our sin is taken away, forgotten, forgiven. No other sacrifice could do what we need. The thousands of Old Testament sacrifices couldn’t take away sin. Only Christ could, and he offered for all time one sacrifice for sins. Keeping the end goal in mind—eternal life—enables us to deal with the setbacks in life and live in joyful anticipation of heaven.

John 5:25-29

What have you done with the time God has entrusted to you? Have you spent it wisely? Sometimes. Have you done good, or have you done what is evil? Our answer to those questions has to be, “Yes.” We have done plenty of evil things. Just look at the carnage sin has left in our wake after a week filled with missteps, mistakes, and misstatements. When the Son of Man comes to judge, what will he say about all the time we’ve spent doing what is evil? He will pronounce us forgiven, for his sake. He spent his time perfectly so that all our missteps, mistakes, and misstatements can be forgiven. We can spend our time wisely. Everything we do glorifies our Savior, who will call our bodies from the grave to live in glory forever.

**Christ the King**

Daniel 7:13-14

I can’t wait to be part of that crowd in heaven that knows exactly how it will spend its time and energy—worshiping the one and only Son of Man! There are days when it feels like that moment is so far away—too far away. Even as I wait, he rules. He reigns. His rule is eternal. His kingdom can’t ever be destroyed. I can’t wait to live in that place where I will manage my time and gifts perfectly!

Revelation 1:4b-8

Grace and peace are yours. To the Triune God be glory forever and ever! Why? Our Heavenly Father loves us. Christ Jesus, the firstborn from the dead, has freed us from our sins by his blood shed on the cross. The Holy Spirit has brought us into a special relationship with God—giving us a unique status and service. In response to God’s love we glorify God with thanksgiving. We glorify him through our service, worship, and offerings. This glorifying of our God is not just a Sunday morning task. Whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do it all to the glory of God. It permeates our life. It shows itself in our love for people. Christ the King is coming. To him be glory and power forever and ever. Amen.

John 18:33-37

Praise the Lord for our God-given faith that compels us to know and believe the answers to Pilate’s questions. Jesus is the king of every human being. Jesus’ kingdom is not of this world. Jesus’ is the epitome of truth—not one deceitful, inaccurate word has ever flowed from his mouth. Jesus has seen fit to place us *on the side of truth.* We live with the absolute confidence that the Lord is taking care of us every moment of our lives. May our lives and our giving reveal this confidence.

*Suggested “One in Christ” readings from the Worship Helps for the special offering service*

1 Chronicles 29:1-9

God’s people rejoice when the Lord, our Savior, moves us to freely and willingly devote ourselves and our resources to him. May God enable us to acknowledge, along with King David, “Everything comes from you, Lord, and we have given you only what comes from your hand” (1 Chronicles 29:14).

2 Corinthians 8:1-12

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ enables Christians to willingly excel in the grace of giving for his kingdom purposes. Regardless of our circumstances, let us eagerly participate in this service to our Lord and to his saints!

John 18:33-37

In the midst of his suffering for the sins of the world, King Jesus describes the nature of his ruling activity. May we listen to his words of truth and invest that which he’s given us to share that saving truth with others!

Matthew 11:7-15

As in the days of John the Baptist, today we see the kingdom of heaven graciously, powerfully advancing in the hearts and lives of sinner-saints around the world. Like a mighty army, the Church believes, lives, and shares the good news of forgiveness and eternal life in Jesus. God use us and all we have to move his kingdom forward—to his glory and others’ benefit!

**Advent 1**

Jeremiah 33:14-16

Unfulfilled expectations and broken promises are so common in our modern world that we’re amazed when we experience someone who actually lives up to their word. In fact, we likely offer them our heartfelt thanks. How refreshing! So, what’s our reaction when the holy God offers the greatest of promises—that of a righteous Savior who will be Our Righteousness? We watch in holy wonder and joy-filled amazement as God fulfills that promise to the letter in Christ. May that wonder and amazement be reflected in our lives as we offer ourselves as expressions of thanks to him!

1 Thessalonians 3:9-13

How can we thank God enough? A thousand thank yous won’t cover all he has given us—lives, homes, families, jobs, health, friends, the Bible, the freedom to worship him, and, above all, the gift of his Son’s death on the cross for our sins and his resurrection so that we can have eternal life with him. We can thank him by returning all that he has given us, prayerfully determining a percentage of our income to be given as soon as we receive it, before we pay our earthly obligations—and then using the remainder in ways that will glorify him. We can thank him by using our lives and talents and possessions in ways that will please him and let others see God’s Spirit in us, praying that he will guide us daily to serve him by serving others.

Luke 21:25-36

Are you ready? Have all your moments of all your days been spent in preparation for the end? Or, as Jesus said, are you weighed down with all the things that seem so important but really aren’t? There is only one way for us to be prepared for Jesus’ return. The forgiveness Jesus earned on the cross makes us ready. We are clean. We are perfect. We are holy. We can stand up and hold our heads high because we belong to him. Meanwhile, we wait. We wonder when he will come. We take care of the things he has entrusted to us, knowing that we can’t hold onto them forever. The only thing that will last, the most important thing that we possess, is Jesus’ promise. He’s coming, and he’s coming soon. Amen! Come soon, Lord Jesus!

**Advent 2**

Malachi 3:1-4

It’s been rightly stated that even the most pious of Christian good works is tainted by sin in some way, small though it may be. If so, then how can God’s people ever bring to our Lord and Savior gifts that please him? Only through the refining, purifying, cleansing love of Jesus. When the Holy Spirit brought us to faith in Jesus, he also sanctified us—set us apart in body and soul— for lives of service to our God. We continue our Advent preparation knowing that we are acceptable to our God by faith in Jesus and so are our gifts of love to him.

Philippians 1:3-11

Paul prayed that the congregation at Philippi would “abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight.” We need to pray this for ourselves and our fellow Christians, to stay in the Word in order to learn God’s will for our lives. We know it is his will that we use our gifts to serve and glorify him, but we need the guidance of Scripture and the encouragement of other Christians to identify our gifts and how and where we can best use them. God loved us so much that he sent his Son Jesus to die for our sins. We have done nothing to deserve this gift, and everything *not* to deserve it, yet he continues to bless us with peace and hope if we put him first in our lives, serving him with the first and best part of our incomes, our talents, and possessions.

Luke 3:1-6

Repentance is key to our preparation for the coming of our Savior. But repentance without a corresponding change in life is no repentance at all. There will be fruits of repentance. God’s forgiving grace changes us from the inside out. That change will be evident to those around us. Ultimately our Lord uses us as agents of his grace to change others, as our entire lives and all the blessings in them become dedicated to service in God’s kingdom.

**Advent 3**

Zephaniah 3:14-17

Sin’s guilt enslaves us. It leads us to cower in fear of the holy God. It drives us to despair, to lose all hope of anything good coming from the Almighty. But the gospel’s saving good news in Christ fills us with spiritual hope and joy, freeing us from guilt, driving away despair, and filling us with the power and desire to live our lives out of love for the One who first loved us and gave himself for us. We “sing” and “shout” our praises to our God with deeds of love toward others and offerings of love toward God.

Philippians 4:4-7

How can God’s people be calm and comfortable, even full of joy in this life, especially at this time of year? We deplore what our world has made of this holy season. We regret what our own lives have become as holiday stresses mount higher and higher. How can we rejoice? In the Lord! We find our comfort in the gracious, eternal peace that our Savior has established by his life, death, and resurrection. That peace stands as God’s sentry at the door of our hearts, enabling us to reflect Christ’s love in our lives, even during the stressful moments of life.

Luke 3:7-18

John the Baptist gave some pretty specific instructions to the crowds on how to produce “good fruit”: Share with those who have less, don’t cheat anyone, be fair and honest, be content. These are good stewardship guidelines for us also: Give to God the portion we have set aside; then serve him by serving others with the remainder. Have a generous attitude. Don’t give anyone reason to question our faith by questioning our honesty. Give thanks to God for everything he has given us, especially the gift of eternal life through the death of Jesus on the cross and his resurrection on the third day. We should always pray that God will send the Holy Spirit into our hearts to produce “fruit in keeping with repentance,” to glorify him in all we do.

**Advent 4**

Micah 5:2-5a

Wonder of wonders, our God takes the lowly and despised things of this world and exalts them in service to his eternal and saving kingdom! He did that with lowly Bethlehem, elevating it as the town in which the God-man entered our world. He does the same with his people. He has completed a spiritual makeover in us. He has made condemned sinners into royal priests who have the privilege of serving him, offering him the sacrifices of our lives.

Hebrews 10:5-10

God doesn’t want our *stuff*! He doesn't want our money, our houses, our cars, our boats, our cell phones, or any of the things that are so important to our everyday lives. Besides, it is all his anyway. He gave it to us. He wants our *hearts.* He loved us enough to sacrifice his Son for our sins. His is a greater gift than any earthly thing we can imagine, and all we have to do is acknowledge it and believe it with our whole hearts. When we realize how much God loves us, it is only natural to show our love to him. We do this by living our lives in ways that glorify him, using our money, possessions, talents, and time in service to others and to spread the gospel.

Luke 1:39-55

When the God of salvation acts, his people respond with praise and thanksgiving. When Elizabeth greeted Mary as the mother of the promised Savior of the world, Mary did what comes naturally to Christians who are impressed with the Lord’s love and faithfulness—she glorified the Lord. Keep that response in mind and heart as you ponder the Christ-filled manger. Here is God’s greatest gift to you! How will you thank him?

**Christmas Eve**

Isaiah 9:2-7

“To us a child is born.” That’s the very heart of the gospel—that God sent his Son into this world as a baby boy to be our Savior. We have heard that good news and we believe it. Now, what will we do with that good news? God help us share it!

Titus 2:11-14

On this Christmas Eve night when “The people walking in darkness have seen a great light,” we focus on the birth of Jesus Christ, our Savior. We have vital choices in life—to grow toward the “light” or the “darkness,” toward “ungodliness and worldly passions” or “self-controlled, upright and godly lives.” We strive toward the example that Jesus gave us, lived for us, died for us—of faith, hope, and love, “eager to do what is good.” As managers of our life choices and all of the concerns and resources of our lives, we strive toward wellness and balance of body, mind, and spirit. “The grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men.” The “blessed hope” of this free grace is a gift given to us—the blessings and benefits of which we must share with all men, so that they will know Jesus and his unconditional love. As stewards also of the gospel message, there is no time like the present to share this best of news!

Luke 2:1-20

If the Baby Jesus was the first Christmas gift, then the second would have to be the glorious news the angels told the shepherds, that a Savior had been born. Once they had seen and worshiped him, opened the Gift, did they hide it, hoard it, and keep it to themselves until the newness wore off? No, they spread the Word to everyone. We have received the same Good News: Christ the Savior, God’s Son, came to earth as a baby, and lived among us without sinning. He died on the cross as the spotless sacrificial lamb for our sins and rose from the grave on the third day to defeat sin and death. We can no more keep it to ourselves than the shepherds could. We have to share the Good News in everything we do and use every word we say to bring the unsaved to Christ.

**Christmas Day**

Isaiah 52:7-10

When I think of beautiful parts of the body, I don’t think of feet. But these feet mentioned by the prophet aren’t beautiful because of their appearance; they are beautiful because of their purpose—bringing the Good News. God has blessed us with everything we are and everything we have. Some of these things may not seem especially beautiful to us until we acknowledge that they are undeserved gifts from our Heavenly Father. By the power of the Holy Spirit, our response should be to use everything, our humble possessions and homely qualities, as well as those that seem more attractive and presentable, to glorify our Creator and display to others the love of Jesus. His death on the cross was certainly not beautiful to see or experience, but it was beautiful because of its purpose, to redeem us from our sin.

Hebrews 1:1-9

Christmas means we don’t have to wonder who God is, what he says, or what he does. Because of Christmas we have God in human flesh. We belong to him and he belongs to us. Jesus is the greatest gift God could give us. What will you do with that gift?

John 1:1-14

These first words of John’s gospel reveal to us that we are celebrating more than the birthday of a little baby who was born in Bethlehem. We are celebrating the visible entrance of God’s Son into our sinful world and personal lives. We are celebrating the entrance of the one who also gets the credit for the creation of the world, for the light of salvation that has been turned on in our lives, for our adoption as children of God. This morning’s message gives us all the motivation we will ever need to join the wise men in bringing gifts to our Savior’s church. Our gifts are turned into gospel action in our local congregation and through our worldwide church body, the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod.

**Christmas 1**

1 Samuel 2:18-20, 26

It’s true that the boy Samuel gives us a picture of Christ, who also “grew in stature and in favor with the LORD and with men.” But it’s also true and a saving blessing for us that Jesus represented Samuel, and not only Samuel, but every sinner. Christ is our Substitute, our perfect representative before God. So now our God sees us dressed in the holiness of Christ by faith in him. Our God now views our deeds of love through the holiness of Christ. We, too, have the favor of God! A glorious transformation! And now we have the opportunity to show it each day of our lives.

Hebrews 2:10-18

Why do we go to church, communion, and Bible study? Why do we share our offerings of time, talents, and treasure with the Lord’s church? Why do we strive to live a Christian life at home, school, work, and play? Why do we turn to the Lord with penitent hearts after we have sinned? The answer is found in our epistle lesson this morning. We are no longer estranged from our Heavenly Father through our sins. Instead Jesus has made us part of God’s family—his own brothers and sisters!

Luke 2:41-52

What was it like to experience Jesus growing up, to raise a perfect child, to have a perfect friend, to enjoy a perfect student? Luke tells us that everyone was amazed at him. He even understood his purpose for being on this earth. How astounding! And yet he was just like any other Jewish boy: “he grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men.” He was just the Savior we need: true God and true man. Because he perfectly carried out his Father’s plan of salvation, we now have the power and motivation to use our gifts and abilities to carry out his kingdom work.

**New Year’s Eve**

Isaiah 51:1-6

As we look back on the year nearly past and forward to the next, we may have our doubts and concerns to say the least. It may be more accurate to say that we’re filled with fear. But recall the God of your salvation. He took an unlikely couple (Abraham and Sarah), and produced a great nation through whom he sent the Savior. His promises are rock-solid and divinely sure. His Word cannot fail. May his Word of love in Christ erase your fears and empower you with hope as you commit your life to him.

**New Year’s Day**

Philippians 2:9-13

Names are hugely important. That’s why large corporations dole out millions of dollars to get their names placed in large letters on highly visible places. But there’s no name that comes close to the importance of the name “Jesus.” It’s the only name by which we’re saved, the only name that guarantees us life with him in heaven. By God’s grace you know his saving name. He placed his name on you at your baptism. Each day of your life is an opportunity to honor his name by the way that you live and by what you do with what he’s given you.