Stewardship by the Lectionary

*The Bible has plenty to say on stewardship. Enough, in fact, for stewardship-themed lessons every week based on readings from the lectionary. The following lessons tied to Year C of the three-year series can be incorporated into sermons, bulletin inserts, newsletters, prayers, or devotions. Each year a lesson is written for a different reading. All lessons available so far are included for each week.*

**Pentecost 16**

Proverbs 9:8-12

The fear of the Lord as the beginning of wisdom also finds application in our stewardship. Folly is a hoarder and mocks generosity: “The more you give away, the less you will have!” And then it wallows in misery, vainly wondering why more than enough is never enough. Only by the fear of the Lord —faith—can we understand that the Lord is our everything and when we demonstrate that through everything he gives us, we are blessed.

Philemon 1:1,10-21

How awful slavery is! How cold and lifeless a heart must be to treat a fellow human being like an object. Onesimus was more than an object. Think of the emotional, physical, and spiritual strength he gave to Paul in prison. But he was even more than that: a body and soul redeemed by Jesus, a heart brought to faith in the Savior God, a truly free man. He was a Son of God and a brother in faith. God, forgive us for treating others as objects and open up our eyes to see and to serve them as you do.

Luke 14:25-33

It is hard to talk about giving back to God without noticing the blessings God promises in return for our stewardship. But giving in order to get a reward is not scriptural. Martin Luther fought that evil long ago as people supposed they could pay for forgiveness and thereby earn the promise of salvation. There is a cost to discipleship, our gospel reading reminds us, but we do not bear the cost. God paid all the cost through Jesus Christ. Because of this we can respond to God with commitment as the Holy Spirit, through us, builds the church. Our commitment is not a blind commitment—without understanding the cost to us or to God—but a commitment based on knowing we have salvation in Jesus Christ, which allows us to commit all, even our lives, to God’s service.

Psalm 19

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

**Pentecost 17**

Exodus 32:7-14

The Israelites were eager to exchange the Father’s presence for a non-God. Then they gave the statue credit for God’s grace (and consider how much they paid for it)! We shake our heads: How could they? But what if we change the golden calf into our own aspirations and achievements, or our own money, or the wealth we wish we had? God’s anger burns, but with amazing grace he is faithful to his promise and punishes his Son instead. The wealth we employ in his service isn’t wasted. Satan used Israel’s riches as a tool to draw them away from God. God uses our riches as a tool to draw us and others ever closer to him.

1 Timothy 1:12-17

What did Paul do that God should show him mercy? He blasphemed, he persecuted, and he killed. His ignorance and unbelief weren’t excuses for his behavior—they just explain it. God didn’t show Paul mercy because he was a diamond in the rough, but rather because he needed it so desperately. And God wasn’t stingy: He poured out Jesus and every blessing that comes with him onto the worst of sinners so that he could be a role model of God’s grace, so that people might witness his changed status and life before God and realize that God’s mercy is also for them. Sound familiar? What God did for Paul, he did for you. God hasn’t been stingy with his grace. We need not be either.

Luke 15:1-10

We were precious to Jesus before Jesus was ever precious to us. He devoted all of his attention, all of his resources, to find you! And when he folded you into his arms through baptism and put you onto his shoulders, he was even happier than you were! Now he bestows on you the honor of joining in his work and sharing in his joy. Through your labor, dollars, words to others, and your prayers to God, you join him in his work of seeking and saving the lost.

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!

**Pentecost 18**

Amos 8:4-7

The LORD was taking notes. Israel’s greed had broken out into thievery. Their riches increased at the expense of the poor. God didn’t take their sin lightly: “I will never forget anything they have done.” His words sting us. He knows how we have abused his gifts and our neighbors. He knows the greed behind it all. He’s taken notes. But instead of punishing us, he punished Jesus for our sins. He didn’t forget a single one when Jesus was on the cross. Now, at peace with him, we aren’t eager for our worship to be over so we can get back to serving ourselves. Our entire lives are worship. Having received from God, we give to others.

1 Timothy 2:1-8

A person who is disobedient in both great and small things; who shows no compassion for human, animal, or plant; who lives a life of constant bickering and fighting—can such a person be a Christian? With great difficulty, perhaps, but not likely. Such a person doesn’t exhibit the right temperament to have the Holy Spirit living within, directing all of life. Can a person have the Holy Spirit within and then so terribly mismanage time, money, and abilities so that life is one big mess? Possibly, but not likely. Mismanagement will happen as we are still sinners in need of God’s forgiveness. But we are to strive to be such good stewards of all God gives that we serve as models to the world of compassion, obedience, peaceable living, and proper application of all our resources.

Luke 16:1-13

Jesus was fond of using parables involving money in order to teach spiritual truths. Think of the unmerciful servant, the talents, the workers in the vineyard. Here, however, Jesus uses a parable involving money to actually address the way Christians use their money. Get a clue from the unbelieving world! Be wise with your money! It’s valuable! Not, however, in the way the unbeliever values it, as a master he serves. It’s valuable, rather, as a means of proclaiming God’s means of grace. The money that we give to the Lord through the church enables the seminary student to devote his time to study, the missionary to make the evangelism call, the daughter congregation to rent a place to worship. God gives us temporary riches to use wisely, so that we might use them to give eternal riches.

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!

**Pentecost 19**

Amos 6:1-7

“Couch potato.” What do those words bring to mind? It’s probably the same picture Amos was describing in the Old Testament lesson for today. Fat cat? Same thing. In our society today we have a severe case of what one economist calls “affluenza.” We are burdened by the general affluence of society so that we become apathetic to the crying needs of the world around us. And the greatest need is that of hearing the gospel message. Since there is only one way that happens—through the church—it means people must be actively involved, not apathetic. Pew sitters are not to be couch potatoes. Church members are to be excited about using all that God provides to proclaim the good news of Christ and his sacrifice for the salvation of all. In a world of general affluence, there are more than enough resources to do the job. All we need is a little less apathy.

1 Timothy 6:6-16

Love of money and the mirage of contentment it creates plunges many (Christians included) into many griefs. Our disappointment in what we have or do not have comes, not from God’s lack of blessings, but from our refusal to be content. Forgiveness in the blood of Jesus, and trust in God’s promises are the only treasures that can empower us to pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance, and gentleness. Then and only then, will we have “godliness with contentment.”

Luke 16:19-31

Which man was rich? Hoarding his wealth for his own pampering manifested the poverty of the “rich” man’s soul. His concern for his brothers came too late. God grant that we always recognize our true wealth in Jesus. Then we will employ our earthly goods for eternal purposes, so that through them our lost brothers and sisters can listen to Moses and the prophets before it is too late.

Psalm 146

As the nameless rich man demonstrates in today’s Gospel reading, material wealth does not promote generosity. Even the dogs paid more attention to Lazarus than he did. Psalm 146 reinforces where the poor person’s help comes from—not from mortal princes, but from the Maker of heaven and earth. His usual means of providing such help is his people. He gives us wealth so that we might use it for others. More importantly, he gives us hearts that care about others. In this way he allows us to join him in his work: “The LORD gives . . . the LORD loves . . . the LORD watches over”—and so much of that he does through us.

**Pentecost 20**

Habakkuk 1:1-3; 2:1-4

As we read the opening verses from Habakkuk where he questions why there is so much injustice and why those who are evil seem to have it so good, you almost wonder if he is our contemporary. What he writes could easily be asked by us today. And just as the problem expressed by Habakkuk is relevant to us, so is the Lord’s answer. He says judgment day is coming. On that day all those who have done evil will get what they deserve, “but the righteous will live by his faith.” What comfort! And what a reminder! The greatest thing we can do until judgment day is use the resources that God gives us to share the faith that saves. Let us not grow tired from the evil and the seeming misappropriation of riches in the world around us, but let us tirelessly share the gospel with all the resources we have so that those who are evil may repent and be saved—just like us!

2 Timothy 1:3-14

As God’s elect, his grace in Jesus Christ has been upon us for eternity. The faith he has put in our hearts gives us a spirit of power, love, and self-discipline to fan into flame the best we have to give to God in every aspect of our lives—the best for our families who share God’s Word with us, the best for our occupations by which God gives us our possessions, and the best for congregations and synod by which God blesses us with Word and sacrament, the training of workers for God’s harvest field, and the sending of workers into his fields at home and around the world.

Luke 17:1-10

Minimum standards. Schools have them. Corporations have them. The government has them. A contract (covenant) is normally written based on minimum standards. If the job is completed according to the minimum standards, the student, the worker, or the contractor is paid the agreed-upon amount. In our Gospel reading for today, Jesus is saying the same holds true in the kingdom of God. There is a minimum standard of belief that invokes the covenant promise. Eternal life is available to all who have basic faith in Jesus Christ as their Savior. There is, however, also a minimum standard of performance in living under the contract. The servant who does his duty, Jesus says, receives appropriate and agreed-upon rewards. As managers for God of his property, our stewardship is part of a minimum standard—it is what is expected of us by the Master.

Psalm 27

How great is our God? He is our Light—we can see exactly where we need to go. He is our Salvation—he has rescued us from every last sin. He is our Stronghold—when life is tough and we don’t know where to turn, we have a safe place to go. What is the one thing we want, most of all, as we think about all the things God has done for us? Lord, I want to spend some time in your house. I want to look at the incredible things you’ve done for me and contemplate them. I want to see and hear the ways you reveal yourself in your Word. Is there any better way to use our time and energy?

**Pentecost 21**

Ruth 1:1-19a

No one would argue that Naomi and Ruth endured their share of heartache at losing their husbands, not to mention the financial and economic distress that must have resulted. When we face similar trials I hope we would follow Ruth’s example more so than that of Naomi. Naomi became quite bitter, but Ruth remained faithful both to her mother-in-law as well as to her God. Ruth had a trust in God, worked in her by the Holy Spirit—a trust that would not let her become bitter or despair, but that looked to her God for what she needed. We know that Ruth’s trust was indeed rewarded when God provided for her through the believing Boaz. We should know that our trust will be rewarded by our God too, if not here on this earth, most certainly in heaven.

2 Timothy 2:8-13

God’s words and promises are never chained, even if it seems like we are! When fear paralyzes us and keeps us from trusting God or giving him our best, “remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead!” We can only “endure everything for the sake of the elect,” as Paul did, by relying on God’s promise to us that he will remain faithful always.

Luke 17:11-19

Imagine what it must have been like to be the Samaritan leper. He was mixed in with this group of nine Jewish lepers as Jesus approached. Jesus told them to go to the priests. The Samaritan leper obeyed Jesus’ command even though he was forbidden to see the Jewish priests. Full of faith in what Jesus said, he must have thought, “Surely Jesus will provide a way.” Then imagine the faith it took, after he was healed, not to complete the journey but to take a chance by turning back. What if, in turning back, his disease would return? Why did the Samaritan leper do it? For the praise Jesus would give? Certainly not. It was just the right thing to do because of what had happened. Our stewardship is the same. It is the right thing to do because of how much God gives us in Jesus.

Psalm 111

“Praise the LORD!” The psalmist begins with these words and provides plenty of evidence why we need to praise the LORD. The LORD has done powerful deeds. Praise him! He is gracious and compassionate. Praise him! He provides food. Praise him! He remembers his promises. Praise him! He has redeemed us. Praise him! The LORD has done everything worthy of praise—not you and me! That changes the way we look at ourselves and the gifts we bring him. We don't give because we have to give something up or hand something over. We give because we have another opportunity to praise him!

**Pentecost 22**

Genesis 32:22-30

“I can’t.” “We can’t.” Those words were not in Jacob’s vocabulary anymore. He had gone from being the “Trickster” to the “Struggler.” The Lord never promises an easy road to the goals he gives us in our lives. Don’t let go of the Lord and his promises. He assures us that his blessing is upon us even as we limp along in life.

2 Timothy 3:14-4:5

The moment the Lord brought us to faith is the same moment he began to compel us to do as Paul charges Timothy. Thanks to the working of the Holy Spirit through the means of grace (Word and sacraments) we have been equipped for every good work. It is our contact with the Word and sacraments that compels us to share our time, talents, and money with the Lord’s church. It is our contact with the means of grace that convinces us that, no matter what vocation we are in, we are serving the Lord with the gifts he has given us.

Luke 18:1-8a

In this parable Jesus echoes a theme about our God that we have heard in other places in Scripture: “If this is what an unbeliever does for you, how much more won’t your Father in heaven do for you?” Here we see an unbelieving judge answering the fervent plea of a widow. How much more then won’t our God answer our prayerful pleas? Whether you are enduring heartache, sickness, loneliness, or financial distress, go to your God in prayer! He will hear you. He will answer you. He is a gracious God who wants what is best for you and he has the power to give you what you ask. But just as the woman in our parable asked for justice, make sure your prayerful requests are focusing on what is most important: spiritual things.

Psalm 121

Have you seen the signs in a neighbor’s yard? “This house protected by . . .” The sign warns thieves that a security system protects the house. Wouldn’t it be nice to put up a sign that lets everyone know that “This house protected by the LORD”? He doesn’t fall asleep on the job. He’s always awake, alert, and on the job. He takes care of us and all that we have. What a comforting thought as we fall asleep. Whether I’m awake or asleep, coming or going, the LORD is taking care of me, my family, and everything I own!

**Pentecost 23**

Deuteronomy 10:12-22

Moses offers the LORD’s definition of a good steward: 1) fear the LORD, 2) walk in his ways, 3) love him, 4) serve him, 5) observe his commands. Why would we want to do all of that? The LORD has already done it all for us. He loves us, even though we don’t deserve it. He chose us, even though we ran away as far and as fast as we could. He takes care of the needy, even when we forget about them. He has done so much for us. We can respond with lives that serve him!

2 Timothy 4:6-8, 16-18

May God grant to us the confidence and the faith of the apostle Paul. He had endured severe hardship in his life and even now was facing likely death. Yet because of his faith in his Savior, he was confident that he would experience the great riches of heaven. May we too not lose faith if the riches of this life prove elusive. For after this life we have the greatest riches imaginable waiting for us: the crown of righteousness, a heavenly kingdom, and the glory of our God. Those are the riches that are ours through faith in Christ Jesus.

Luke 18:18-27

The parable of the rich ruler is a classic story of the love of money being the root of all kinds of evil. It is evident the rich ruler thought he could worship at two altars: the altar of the one true God and the altar of the “Baal of our age”—materialism. The point of this story is not the ruler having all kinds of this world’s wealth, but what he did with it. May all of us pray that the Lord would give us wisdom and, more importantly, faith as we manage the many physical assets he has given us.

**Reformation**

Jeremiah 31:31-34

Many people like to remember the good old days. These conversations invariably turn to all the stupid things that have been done. The good old days really weren’t all that good. When God looks back on his people, he sees unfaithfulness. His people the Israelites had broken the covenant that he had made with them. They had annulled their marriage with the Lord. But the Lord points to the future: “the time is coming when I will make a new covenant,” a covenant of grace and forgiveness. Remembered no more will be our unfaithfulness: our sinful misuse of our time, talents, and treasures. Taught by the Lord our God, we his people will “know the Lord.” We will know his love, sacrifice, resurrection, and will. These will fill our hearts and minds with the desire and knowledge to live for him. These are “the days.” Saved by God’s grace, we use our time, talents, and treasures to overflow in thanks to our God.

Romans 3:19-28

What a beautiful message Paul’s words deliver to every one of us. We “are justified freely by his grace.” One of the teachings the Lord used Martin Luther to return to the church was that by God’s grace we are saved—not by our works. Everything we do in life, including our offerings, are compelled by the love of Christ. This love has been placed in our hearts at the very moment the Lord brought us to faith. Every time the offering plate is filled in a worship service, those gifts are to be looked upon as gifts of love from God’s people, motivated by God’s grace.

John 8:31-36

We often forget that we are, by nature, slaves to sin. That slavery rears its ugly head each day as we fool ourselves into believing that we are in control of our lives and are not actually slaves. Remaining in Jesus’ words convinces us of the truth: we are slaves to sin but Jesus has set us free. Only with this understanding are we able to freely serve Jesus and give him our best in every aspect of our lives—time, talents, and treasures.

Psalm 46

Such a noisy psalm! Mountains crumble and crash into the sea! The sea roars and foams, crashing against the rest of the mountain range, trying to drag it down into the depths! In the middle of the deafening roar, a beautiful river gently winds through God’s city—a scene of incredible peace and quiet. We sit by the stream, surrounded by walls that cannot be shaken, and the quiet envelops us. We bolt upright, frightened as even more sounds crash all around us—the sounds of earthquakes and battles. With a word and a gentle hand, the LORD hushes us: “Be still, and know that I am God.” Our lives are in his hands, and we are content.