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 A 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 13**

Isaiah 56:1, 6-8

The One who was pierced for our transgressions and crushed for our iniquities declares to his redeemed, “There are more!” He would gather a remnant of Judah back to himself, but he would also bring foreigners to his altar and his temple would be called a house of prayer for all nations. There are still more, and God will continue to gather his elect into his church until his return in glory. He uses us as his instruments and equips us for the work. His words refocus the purpose of our lives and our assets, and they rekindle our joy to serve: “Here am I! Send me!”

Romans 11:13-15, 28-32

Paul’s love for his unbelieving fellow Jews that he introduced in Romans 9:1-5 continues to find expression here. The Jews’ rejection of the gospel resulted in its going to the Gentiles, but that did not relieve Paul of his concern for the Jews’ salvation. No, he now considers the Jews to be mission prospects for the Gentiles. Jewish rejection resulted in Gentile salvation; now may Gentile salvation result in Jewish salvation. May the Lord fill us with the love of Christ like Paul, that we might see and take advantage of the mission field around us—even for those who have tasted the truth and rejected it!

Matthew 15:21-28

Wouldn’t we be discouraged as Christians if only certain ones of us received blessings from God? While some suffered in the congregation, others would receive bountiful goodness from the Lord. Thanks be to God that this is not the case. True, there are varieties of gifts given to us by the Spirit, but the Spirit does not withhold gifts from anyone. Neither does God’s grace fall only upon the deserving, but it is free to all, especially sinners. It is because of God’s love for us that he gave his best gift of Christ Jesus to die for our sins. It is this outpouring of grace that we acknowledge as God’s stewards when we respond in thanksgiving with our offerings of self.

Psalm 133-134

Our unity as God’s people is founded on the truth of God’s Word, the teaching of “life forevermore” through Jesus. Sin and false teaching threaten to divide us. That means we who have, by God’s grace, been entrusted with his truth have a tremendous responsibility to not only preserve it but also to share it. May we use all that we have and are toward that goal.

**Pentecost 14**

Exodus 6:2-8

With reluctance Moses had followed the Lord’s call to rescue his people, but his efforts only made things worse. The Israelites grumbled against Moses as they gathered their straw for bricks. Moses passed on the complaint to God. Four times in six verses God reminded Moses whom he was dealing with: “I am the LORD.” “I am the LORD,” or “Yahweh,” is the faithful God who keeps his promises. He would keep his promise to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob. Israel would see him keep his word through their deliverance. Moses could also carry out his call with confidence that God would not let him down. May we also remember whom we’re dealing with: “I am the LORD.”

Romans 11:33-36

This doxology concludes a section on the unfathomable riches of God’s grace in the salvation history of Jews and Gentiles. Even when the gospel seems to fail, God sees to it that it succeeds. We cannot comprehend his wisdom, but we praise him for it. Rarely can we see what he is working through our gospel proclamation, but we know that it is good. Our support of gospel ministry is never a waste. God works through it in his unsearchable wisdom.

Matthew 16:13-20

Jesus’ life was a living testimony of who he was. Were the disciples observant? What did they see in Jesus? Was his living testimony clear? Did it dispel the common misconceptions and occasional misunderstanding of his mission? We can ask the same questions about our own lives. Are they testimonies of our Christianity? Are our beliefs evident in our actions? Could people describe who we are in Christ by observing how we live? Someone once said, “I can tell who you are by looking at your calendar and your checkbook.” What we choose as priorities in our lives witnesses to where we place our faith and trust. As stewards of all God gives, our living and giving will reflect our faith.

Psalm 34

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

*Christian Worship: Supplement*

Joshua 4:1-9

Joshua instructed the leaders of his people to construct a memorial of stones in the Jordan River so that God’s people would recall his faithfulness to them. Our “memorial” to the Lord’s faithfulness to us is the cross of our Savior, Jesus Christ. The cross is a constant reminder of what our God has done for us, guaranteeing us life in his presence forever. How will that memorial assist you in dedicating your life to him?

**Pentecost 15**

Jeremiah 15:15-21

Jeremiah had given his all to the Lord’s work of warning Jerusalem of its impending destruction, but he had nothing to show for it except the hatred of his countrymen and his own disappointment. He wondered aloud if God was failing him. Notice what Jeremiah’s repentance for his lack of trust would produce: the opportunity to keep on serving. God would go with him and make him an invincible a wall of bronze; he would rescue him from trouble. We repent of our distrust, of our failure to serve God out of disappointment. Not only does he forgive, he gives more opportunities to serve and goes with us in our work. We can’t lose.

Romans 12:1-8

What is “sacrificial living?” Does it mean that one should do without enough food, clothing, and shelter so that there can be support for God’s kingdom? Certainly it must mean that we are to give up all our luxuries, excesses, and wants, right? Not exactly. The term “living sacrifice” refers to Old Testament sacrifices. The word used in Greek means “a wholly consumed (by fire) sacrifice.” It had a number of connotations in the context of Old Testament worship. One, it meant that the sacrifice was “relinquished to God’s use” with no strings attached. It was a willing sacrifice for God to do with as he pleased. Second, it was always given in the context of worship. Our offerings today are to be seen as an integral part of worship. Third, it was consumed. God wants your living service. He desires that your entire being be given over to him, no strings attached, as an act of worship. And should your whole life be consumed in service to the Lord, rejoice, for he has promised to give you a new life in heaven!

Matthew 16:21-26

Christian stewardship stands out in bold all the way through Jesus’ words! His call to his disciples goes beyond our tithe to our very life. Before our money or anything else, he desires our hearts, our will, our self. The resulting struggle is the cross he promises to every Christian. Life can never be found in the empty promises of this world, but in Christ alone.

*Christian Worship: Supplement*

Judges 16:22-31

As great as Samson’s final act of sacrificial service to the Lord was, it also causes us to wonder, “What if his entire life had been a daily sacrifice of service to the Lord?” Imagine the many other great things God could have done through him! Imagine the great things God will accomplish through you by faith in Jesus as you devote each day of your life to him!

**Pentecost 16**

Ezekiel 33:7-11

Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary professor John Jeske once said, “Stewardship is taking God at his word.” God is faithful to his promises—all of them. Ezekiel proclaimed God’s promises as his watchman. A loving, gospel-motivated response to God’s Word is our Christian stewardship—faithfully clinging to the promises of the Faithful One, even when those promises are difficult.

Romans 13:1-10

Sometimes we think that people in biblical times didn’t have the same problems as we do, but respect for authority, paying taxes, and avoiding debt are very contemporary problems. Paul made it clear that we are to respect and obey those who govern us. The rulers of his time were certainly no “nicer” than modern politicians, and yet their authority is from God. The tax dollars of those times were spent no more wisely than they are today. We may feel we are drowning in debt, but people in Paul’s time were sent to jail or sold into slavery to pay off debts! These things are part of the stewardship of all that God gave us when he placed us in our earthly lives. We do these things because God loved us and sent his Son to take the punishment for our sins, to die and rise again. We do these things to bring glory to his name.

Matthew 18:15-20

Look where the Lord’s concern lies. If our brother sins against us, Jesus’ concern is for . . . our brother! But isn’t it we who are hurting? Yes, and his heart and help go out to the hurting—but also to the one who caused the pain. When a fellow Christian sins against us, we have a responsibility to him: to protect his reputation if possible, but to protect his soul at all costs. We have the responsibility and the authority to act in the name of our Savior to save his life, and he’s with us as we do so. Could we call this the stewardship of courage? Again, God supplies the resources himself with his promise: I’m with you.

*Christian Worship: Supplement*

Galatians 2:11-21

Do you wonder if Paul struggled with whether or not to confront Peter regarding his actions that had undermined the gospel? Have you ever struggled to find the courage to defend God’s truth? We all have. But how critical that kingdom activity is! God promises to send us his Holy Spirit to fill us with his courage and to give us the words we feel compelled to speak. May that promise fill you with courage when you defend his gospel truth! May he use you to support those whom you’ve called to defend his truth among you!

**Pentecost 17**

Genesis 50:15-21

Joseph very easily could have held a grudge against his brothers. After all, they sold him into slavery. So the brothers’ concern that Joseph would pay them back now that their father was dead made perfect sense. What did not make perfect sense was how Joseph reacted. He assured them that God had a plan, that he had forgiven them, and that he would continue to provide for them and their families. God, working in Joseph’s heart, led him to use his position, power, and wealth to provide for those who had wronged him. May God work in our hearts so that we are as eager to use our earthly blessings for others!

Romans 14:5-9

We belong to the Lord. No matter how much or how little we have from a human standard—no matter how strong or weak we are from a spiritual standard—all we are and all we have is the Lord’s. Manage his resources in a way that reflects that fact and do not be quick to pass judgment on another whose gifts, blessings, and maturity may be different from yours.

Matthew 18:21-35

Ten thousand talents is equivalent to millions of dollars. Jesus’ intention was to pick a debt so huge that the servant could never pay off the debt. Neither could any of us offer up enough money, time, or service to buy ourselves out of sin. Yet with one pronouncement from the cross, “It is finished,” Jesus did that for us. Our debt is paid. And what is the proper response for that? Is constant thankfulness and praise enough? Is offering to serve him all our days enough? Is bringing an offering of all we have enough? Could we ever return enough to properly thank God for forgiving our debt of sin? No. But by managing all of life and all of life’s resources for God’s purposes, we can demonstrate that we understand and are willing to respond to the payment of that debt.

*Christian Worship: Supplement*

Ephesians 4:29-5:2

Does stewardship include the way we manage our mouths? What happens when our words hurt instead of build up? Does stewardship include controlling our emotions? What happens when bitterness, rage, brawling, and slander mar our relationships? The Lord calls us to manage every part of our lives. When we use our mouths to communicate forgiveness we imitate the one who forgave us. When our lives are seasoned with sacrificial love we imitate the one who loved us first and best. That offering pleases the Lord too!

**Pentecost 18**

Isaiah 55:6-9

Believers whom the Lord has found still have the struggles of comprehending God’s thoughts and ways. His thoughts and ways are not our thoughts or our ways. They are so much higher and so much better than ours. When he tells us to trust him and give him our best, he knows what he is doing.

Philippians 1:18b-27

Paul was convinced that even in chains he would be able to continue to live for Christ. How do you live for Christ? How do you live for Christ in respect to your earthly possessions? Paul was convinced that he would even be able to use his time in prison in a way that glorified his Savior. Do you glorify your Savior in how you use your money, time, and talents? Or do we often use our money, time, and talents in ways that glorify ourselves? Like Paul, we should be conscious of the fact that in every facet of life, with everything we have in life, it is an opportunity to praise and honor our God.

Matthew 20:1-16

All of God’s people enjoy his grace, whether they are brought to faith through infant baptism or experience a deathbed conversion. All who die in the faith, no matter when they were brought to faith, get to enjoy the eternal blessings of heaven. Those who have been lifelong members of the church may be tempted to resent those who seem to come into the kingdom during the last moments of their lives. Our Old Adam suggests that it isn’t fair that we spent our lives in God’s church and spent a good portion of our income supporting the Lord’s work, yet some who seldom darkened the church doors and gave little or nothing at the end of their lives get the same guarantee of heaven. It’s at times like those that we need to go to God’s throne and praise him for his Son’s reminder: “So the last will be first, and the first will be last.”

*Christian Worship: Supplement*

Jonah 4:5-11

Did you catch the focal point of Jonah’s life? It was all about “me.” He was angry that God let a shady vine die. He was even more angry about the grace and forgiveness God showed to Nineveh. Jonah only cared about himself. What happens when our focus goes beyond “me, myself, and I”? We can focus on the souls in the world around us. We can lead them to the God whose grace and forgiveness belongs to them too. We put them first so the kingdom of heaven can be theirs too.

**Pentecost 19**

Ezekiel 18:1-4, 25-32

Through these words of the prophet Ezekiel the Lord issues a strong call to repentance. The Lord is warning Israel to turn from their sinful ways. How awful it would be for their sin to keep them out of heaven for all eternity! However, the Lord says that if the wicked person turns away from their wickedness they will live! Just as Israel needed this warning, so do many people today. May we who have heard this warning and taken it to heart use our talents, treasures, and resources to help share it—and God’s promise—with others.

Philippians 2:1-11

The encouragement from being united with Christ—the comfort we have from his love—motivates us to have the same attitude as that of Christ Jesus: humble and giving. That transforms us into generous people of God, eager to give our best in all situations.

Matthew 21:28-32

Which of the two sons in our parable showed more love and respect? To answer out of obligation demonstrates only that the one doing it is afraid of punishment. The son who at first bristled at the command, but later repented and did the work, responded out of love, not fear. He knew what was right and did it. Our giving can be out of obligation or out of love. Which is it for you? Which kind of giving do you think God appreciates more?

*Christian Worship: Supplement*

2 Corinthians 13:5-8

The teacher drops the sheaf of papers on the desk. Ninety minutes of torture—trying to answer questions, wavering between true or false, doubting every multiple choice. It’s the final test of the year. Will we pass or fail? Is that where our lives of stewardship are at—pass or fail? In Christ we can’t fail. Every gift we bring, every minute we spend, every talent we use all goes to glorify Jesus. We can’t fail when we go back to his Truth!

**Pentecost 20**

Isaiah 5:1-7

Just as the owner of this vineyard desired growth in his crops, so also God desires growth in his children. He desires that we grow in how we use our blessings. He desires that we grow in the time we spend in his Word. He desires that we grow in our witnessing ability. And we will grow! We will grow if we faithfully use the means God has given us to grow. That is, if we are faithful in worship, if we regularly attend the sacrament, we will grow and produce God-pleasing results!

Philippians 3:12-21

It’s hard not to fall in love with earthly things. Every commercial, billboard, and ad that pops up on YouTube—all of them promote things, stuff. Did we ever consider that loving all that stuff makes us enemies of the cross? Ah, but we aren’t enemies of the cross. We follow Jesus. Our citizenship is in heaven. We can use all that stuff to serve our Savior as we anticipate the glory that awaits us.

Matthew 21:33-43

“What rotten scoundrels!” you might say. The caretakers of the vineyard were totally irresponsible—even criminal. When the owner gave over the management of the vineyard to these caretakers, he trusted that they would do a good job. Instead the caretakers became greedy and possessive, wanting not only the whole share of the harvest but the vineyard as well. For some people this is the story of their stewardship. We must be careful that we do not become possessive or greedy with what God gives us to manage. As remote as it may seem, loss of faith

and personal destruction are not an unlikely result of chronic mismanagement of God’s grace to us.

**Pentecost 21**

Isaiah 25:6-9

What happens when we make a good investment? We reap the benefits. When we were baptized, the Lord made a good investment in us. He washed us. He saved us. He marked us as his own. One day we’ll sit down to an incredible banquet in heaven. We’ll enjoy the choicest foods and the finest drinks. As we look at each other across the table we’ll see how the Lord’s investment paid off. It’s not a full bank account, an incredible wardrobe, and a stable of sports cars. It’s you; it’s me—with the Lord forever!

Philippians 4:4-13

“Live simply so that others may simply live,” said the bumper sticker. For most of us, there is no “simple” living. Everything is overabundant. Statistics tell us that 38 percent of families below the poverty level in the U.S. have two cars or more. In a country of extraordinary affluence, it is hard to even visualize simple living, let alone move toward practicing it. Paul had learned to be satisfied whether in a situation of abundance or in a situation of poverty. It only takes a tornado or a fire or an earthquake and a few seconds to wipe out a lifetime of accumulation. Managing what we have for God’s purposes, whether in abundance or poverty, is the mark of a good steward. “To whom much is given, much will be expected,” Scripture tells us. The blessing of abundance, for God’s stewards, will result in an abundance of generosity. Pray to God that he will guide your life that whatever you have will properly serve him and others.