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 B of the three-year series can be incorporated into sermons, bulletin inserts, newsletters, prayers, or devotions in the months of January and February. Each year a lesson is written for a different reading. All lessons available so far are included for each week.*

**Christmas 2**

Hebrews 2:10-18

Paul Tillich wrote, “The darkness into which the light of Christmas shines is above all the darkness of death. The threat of death, which shadows the whole road of our life, is the dark background of the Advent expectation of mankind.” We have to die. The soul that sins, it shall die, God’s Word pronounced. Death is part of us from the moment of our conception. It colors every aspect of our lives with a gray tint of decay. We have bucket lists because of death. We have wills because of death. We “live life to the fullest” because of death. But Jesus became our brother to take on death for us. Jesus became our replacement in death. Because Jesus is our brother, Jesus’ death is our death. Death is over. It’s been done. Jesus’ death has defeated death. Death no longer has any effectiveness. Jesus shared what it means to be you so that he could die for you. That is why we want to share what we have with him.

**Epiphany**

Isaiah 60:1-6

In the Eastern Church, the festival of the Epiphany of our Lord is the big celebration, not Christmas. Sadly, it tends to be the forgotten festival among us. It only gets celebrated if January 6 happens to fall on a Sunday. Isaiah uses beautiful picture language to show us why this festival is so important. He foretold that the Savior would not just be for the people of Israel, but for the whole world. That includes you and me. That good news of a Savior guides and directs everything that we do.

Ephesians 3:2-12

Most of us are among the Gentiles to whom Paul is speaking in Ephesians. We too are “sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus.”We too believe in this mystery of God’s Son becoming a man. We know that, thanks to Jesus, we can approach our God with freedom and confidence. We praise the Lord for bringing us into his church. Our offerings are just one way in which we thank the Lord for compelling us to believe in the Epiphany of our Lord.

Matthew 2:1-12

The Magi from the East are a classic example of what happens once the Lord has a grip on people’s hearts. These men and their entourage traveled for miles, over some pretty rough terrain, to worship their king. One of the ways they worshiped their king was by giving him gifts fit for a king. The same Savior with whom they shared their gifts, is the one with whom we share our gifts of time, talents, and money.

**Baptism of our Lord**

Isaiah 49:1-6

The Gospel lesson for this Sunday shows how Jesus began his public ministry by being baptized by John the Baptist in the Jordan River. At that moment, the words that the prophet Isaiah had spoken some seven centuries earlier began to be fulfilled. Jesus is the Servant of the LORD. His work would be winning forgiveness for all people—both Jews and Gentiles alike. That promise is just as good as it was 2,700 years ago. Jesus is our Savior too. That message is the only thing that can equip us to be faithful Christian stewards.

Acts 16:25-34

What a difference faith makes in our lives. Paul and Silas faced the adversity of jail with prayers and hymns. In contrast, when an earthquake opened the doors of the prison, the unbelieving jailer was about to kill himself. With faith we can face adversity because we know that we are at peace with God. In baptism we are made children of God and heirs of salvation. The gospel of forgiveness in Jesus Christ was brought to the jailer in Word and baptism. What a difference faith made in his life. We support the missions of WELS with our offerings so that many people can experience the hope and joy of the jailer of Philippi.

Mark 1:4-11

In the beginning, when God created the world and all that is in it, he declared everything “good.” God was well-pleased with the work of creation. Through Adam’s sin, that goodness was damaged. But at your baptism, God drowned the original sin in you, and you came forth a new creation, a child of God. As such, you now have access to God’s grace and blessing. You are showered with gifts purely out of divine goodness and mercy. As a person reborn as a child of God, you have both the power and the responsibility to rightly care for all God gives: all of his creation, your temporal and spiritual gifts, your talents and abilities. This management of all that God gives we call stewardship. It started at your baptism and continues throughout your entire life, until God calls you home to be with him. Use the power of your baptism to make the most of all that you have as a child of God.

**Epiphany 2**

1 Samuel 3:1-10

Samuel’s mother was a dedicated believer who sent her son off to attend a worker training program under the high priest, Eli. God called Samuel to be his prophet in order to fill a spiritual void in Israel. Samuel followed that call and served faithfully for many years. Today, we also need dedicated parents who encourage full-time service to the Savior. We need faithful young people who will follow God’s call into the ministry. We need worker training schools to prepare these young people for a lifetime of preaching and teaching the good news of Jesus Christ. We also need all of us to support those schools with our prayers and offerings.

1 Corinthians 6:12-20

When we think of being good stewards of all that we have, we often think externally. We think of managing our money, our time, and our abilities. Rarely do we think of managing our mental and physical health. Just as we can mismanage all of the temporal gifts of God, we can mismanage the gifts of food and drink, rest and relaxation, work and vocation. Too much food, drink, relaxation, or work can affect our health. As God’s stewards, we learn to manage what we put into and what influences the body, the mind, and the spirit.

John 1:43-51

This text shows how Jesus called Philip to be an apostle. Philip, in turn, found his friend Nathanael (whom we also know as Bartholomew). Philip sets a fine example for us. Instead of trying to argue Nathanael into being a believer, he leads him to the Word himself. The Word does all the convincing. The same is true today. We can’t make people believe. We can lead them to the Word, and the Holy Spirit can make them believers. With something as simple as “Come and see,” another soul was won for Christ and another missionary began his training.

**Epiphany 3**

Jonah 3:1-5,10

No prophet was ever more successful outwardly than Jonah, yet no prophet was more unhappy with God’s grace. He didn’t want to go to Nineveh in the first place. He didn’t like it that God was forgiving one of Israel’s chief enemies. Maybe we haven’t been as crass as Jonah, but it is easy for us to try to play God, thinking that some people simply don’t deserve the gospel. No one does! But in his infinite love, God wants nothing more than to have a sinner repent, turn from his ways, and rely on Jesus alone. May God’s mercy to Nineveh and to us move us to share his gospel freely with everyone.

1 Corinthians 7:29-31

When John D. Rockefeller, the wealthy oil baron, died, the news media approached his accountant. “How much did he leave behind?” they wanted to know. “All of it,” the accountant replied. The message is clear: everything we hold so dear, everything that seems so real and important to us, is only on loan. It is not ours. God is the owner of all things, even our own bodies, and he will “recall it all” (a phrase used concerning the rich man who built new barns) someday. Even the heavens will be “rolled up like a scroll” says Revelation. The message for stewards? Don’t get too wrapped up in the world, because it’s not ours to possess. God gives all things to us, out of his grace and goodness, to manage as his caretakers.

Mark 1:14-20

Ever since Christ came into the world, things have been different. The kingdom of God is near. We must respond to it. We can’t just shrug it off or push it to a later date on our “to do” list. It demands our immediate attention. It’s a matter of life and death, a matter of eternity. How do we enter the kingdom of God? Repent, Jesus said. Through repentance and faith the kingdom of God is ours. Now, what do we do with it? We cast it out into the world, like fishermen cast out a net. We become fishers of men. Some will listen to Jesus’ call and do that in full-time ministry. But the kingdom of God is not just theirs to share. It is still ours by faith. All of us need to cast out the net into the world. Supporting the mission and ministry of WELS is one way we participate in spreading the kingdom of God and fishing for men.

**Epiphany 4**

Deuteronomy 18:15-20

So many tips for healthier living. So many rules for better parenting. So many guidelines for a more effective use of your time. It’s no wonder we’re so overwhelmed and underqualified for this life—no one could possibly do everything we’re supposed to! Thank God for his “Prophet of Truth!” It’s only from Jesus’ lips that we can know God’s heart. It’s Jesus’ words that bring certain peace. It’s only in Jesus’ life and death that we are free from all of those “do’s.” And now it’s our serving, living, and applying his truth each day that is the measure of our “thank you” to him.

1 Corinthians 8:1-13

“It is for freedom that Christ has set us free!” Being free from the law and its consequences means that God has entrusted a lifetime’s worth of freedom for each of our lives. It follows then that a Christian’s thankful living often consists in the stewardship of his or her freedom. Our love for Jesus is expressed in our love for others—and using our freedom to benefit them.

Mark 1:21-28

The monster that strives to repossess our hearts often uses more subtle tactics than the overt possession of Mark 1. But make no mistake. Whether it’s our own sinful nature or the devil himself, our faiths are under relentless attack by enemies much stronger and craftier than we. Thanks be to Jesus that our Rescuer is mightier still! With the same powerful Word he drives greed, fear, resentment, and coveting from our hearts so that the only possession in our lives is our hearts belonging solely to him. Thankful people indeed!

**Epiphany 5**

Job 7:1-7

Life this side of the veil can be oh, so difficult. And why shouldn’t it be? It isn’t God’s fault that sin entered this world. What we often experience are simply the consequences. In fact, the only relief from the misery, hurt, and seeming futility of living life in a sinful world is God’s answer to that sin. Unmerited forgiveness through Jesus is what gives us relief. Promised protection for God’s family is what gives us hope. Unending life in heaven is what grants us peace. Our natural response? Thankful living and giving despite our troubles. That’s the “thank you card” each believer has the opportunity to write every single day.

1 Corinthians 9:16-23

Wouldn’t it be nice to be able to do whatever you wanted with what you have? You could choose to spend all your money on movie tickets and spend all your time at the cinema. Not! What would happen to your house, the car, or your job—not to mention the family? All might be lost. God empowers us through his Holy Spirit to show our love for him through how we manage his gifts. We are not slaves to a set of rules for stewardship. We don’t live by our rights, but by our privileges. We don’t demand things of God; we bask in his grace. Christian stewardship is voluntary. By our actions in managing all God has given us we show love to God and all humankind.

Mark 1:29-39

Money talks. So too a picture painted well. Actions even louder. Demons, wicked and liars, were not permitted to speak God’s precious truths. And Jesus—he speaks infinitely, even with just his name. That he lets us speak his truths and share in the zeal of making him known speaks volumes of love for us from him!

**Transfiguration**

2 Kings 2:1-12

Walking together along the dusty path, two men head for destiny. It would have been too easy for Elisha to stop somewhere and let Elijah walk on. And it is too easy for us to watch someone else work for the Lord. But the stakes were too high for Elisha, the benefit too wonderful, too necessary! Our journey in ministry is also too important and too full of blessings to stop walking together.

2 Corinthians 3:12-4:2

“When I grow up I want to be like \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.” Fill in the blank. Is it too late? Are you grown up and missed your chance to be like \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_? Is it unlikely that you could ever be like \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_? What if your model were to be like Jesus? What would transform you into his likeness? It is the Holy Spirit working through our baptism that transforms us into a new creation. Our reading says we become like Jesus “with ever-increasing glory.” It is a journey. Part of that journey is to learn to love like Jesus. Part of that journey is to learn to give like Jesus. While not many of us will ever give our lives for another, we can live our lives for others. We can learn to give like Jesus as we practice managing our lives in such a way that all of God’s gifts are used in his service.

Mark 9:2-9

On that unparalleled day in human history, when three of Jesus’ dear ones were allowed to observe what sinners should never see, Peter was moved to cry, “It is good for us to be here!” So Jesus promptly led them down the mountain to learn and serve, because that is how thankful hearts show their love. When we see God’s love through our eyes of faith, our hearts cry with Peter, “It is good for us to be here!”—to be here in God’s family, here worshiping with fellow believers, here safe through Jesus’ selfless work. But like Peter, saying our salvation “is good” is one thing. Showing just how good it is to us by learning and serving is quite another. May God always prompt our active thanks in all we think, say, and do.

**Ash Wednesday**

Isaiah 59:12-20

Wouldn’t it be great to see God’s majestic grace burst out into the world like a breached dam or a tsunami rolling ashore? From the Middle East his glorious gospel is still spreading across the globe, and whole tribes and villages and communities and families are repenting in his name. It happens. The question is: Are we inside that flood of grace our Savior is spreading in the world?

2 Corinthians 5:20b-6:2

The apostle Paul makes it very clear that, thanks to all Jesus accomplished, we are “reconciled to God . . . now is the time of God’s favor, now is day of salvation.” Now is the time to be at God’s work with our lips, our lives, and our total commitment to the Lord’s church. May the management of our time and money reveal that we really believe in the urgency of getting the Lord’s work done now rather than later.

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.

**Lent 1**

Genesis 22:1-18

If God spoke to you, tested your sacrificial limits, how far would you be able and willing to go? Would you “go the distance” as Abraham did? As Moses did? As God himself did, sacrificing his Son, Jesus Christ for your sins? During this season of Lent we reflect upon such questions.

Romans 8:31-39

“If God is for us, who can be against us? . . . Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?” Given the passion and the promises of our Savior, it is quite impossible to prove you can suffer true harm from being generous toward God!

Mark 1:12-15

Jesus spent so much of his valuable time convincing anyone who would listen that their sin was real, debilitating, and deadly. He wanted people to recognize how far away they were from stirring anything like love in the heart of God. He wanted them to conclude that any hope would have to be placed somewhere else—in someone else. But is there any better news in this whole, wide world than the news Jesus shared next—the same news God has shared with us so generously? Guilt? Gone. Shame? Removed. Fear? There’s no reason. Our loving God’s good news is that Jesus has taken care of everything that’s wrong with us. We live to serve him with our gifts, thank him with our time, and love him with everything that we are, because he gave everything he is for us.