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. Each year a lesson is written for a different reading. All lessons available so far are included for each week.*

**Easter 5**

Acts 8:26-40

Philip was not one of the apostles. He was one of the seven deacons who helped with the distribution of food to the Greek Christians (see Acts 6:1-6). When an angel told him to follow the chariot carrying the Ethiopian official, he did not hesitate. When it became clear that the official needed someone to explain the prophecy of Isaiah he was reading, Philip did not say to himself, “That’s not my job. If only one of the apostles was here, he could talk to him.” Philip recognized the opportunity to give the reason for the hope he had. He was “known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom” (Acts 6:3) because he was in the Word. We, too, are prepared to serve the Lord through his Word. We don’t have a “that’s not my job” attitude. Rather, we look for every opportunity to serve the Lord and share the good news of our Risen Lord.

1 John 3:18-24

We live because of Christ. We are compelled to live a God-pleasing life because of Christ living in us. The consistent offering of our time, talent, and treasure for God’s purposes reveals this life of Christ in us and provides testimony of our priorities to those around us.

John 15:1-8

Throughout Scripture we can find vividly illustrated messages from God. The illustration from today’s gospel reading was easily understood at the time it was written, and remains clear for us today. Christ is the “true vine,” the perfect vine, to which the branches—some fruitful and some not—are attached. Those of us who follow him, who remain attached to the true vine, are blessed with his promise: “If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given to you.” Then we will truly be his disciples and, as his stewards, “bear much fruit.” With the temptations of this world, remaining attached can sometimes be difficult. The more we experience the nurturing care and love of the gardener, our Father in heaven, however, the more we become willing managers of the resources God gives.

**Easter 6**

Acts 11:19-26

The Lord provides even in the face of hardship and persecution for the faith we profess. He provided Barnabas with the opportunity to encourage fellow believers, along with Saul (Paul), with the word of the Lord. The Lord also provides opportunity for us to be encouraging as we support gospel-proclaiming efforts through our firstfruits giving.

1 John 4:1-11

“Love one another.” A recipe for a happy and fruitful life? A “nice” way to treat our acquaintances, friends, family—even our enemies? A response to God’s love for us? The apostle John addresses this “love” statement in this week’s epistle reading in the following way: “This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.” The manner in which we conduct our lives and manage our resources will be reflected through the extent to which we follow this guide for life. Response to God’s love by loving others is key.

John 15:9-17

Remain in God’s love. That statement points to two realities. First, as the earlier verses of John 15 state, we remain in God’s love for us as we remain in the gospel through Word and sacrament. Second, this results in our love for God, love that is on full display in our life. This life includes showing love for our fellow Christians. That is the Lord’s simple command: love one another as he loved us. John explained this command in his first epistle: “This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters. If anyone has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need but has no pity on them, how can the love of God be in that person? Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth” (1 John 3:16-18).

**Ascension**

Acts 1:1-11

He’s alive! He is back at the right hand of his Father. He has given us a job, to be his witnesses. We have been given the privilege to tell the people of this world that Jesus is alive and well. We can tell them that Jesus is in control of all things, even making sense of moments when the world seems out of control. There is no time to be idle; the message is too important. Only Jesus knows when he will be returning, and we will have to give an account of our work—work done because of his love for us.

Ephesians 1:16-23

What is the church? The church is the body of Christ. “And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.” The apostle Paul in his letter to the Ephesians expresses his continuous thanks to them for their “faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints.” On this celebration of the ascension of Christ, we are reminded of his “authority, power and dominion.” As members of his body, Christ shares part of his dominion with us as stewards. He gives us creation to care for. He gives us talents to employ in service to the body and to others. He gives us all sorts of resources to manage. Let us prove to be grateful recipients of his grace.

Luke 24:44-53

Like a stone dropped in a lake, repentance and forgiveness have rippled out from Jerusalem to all nations, including to you today as you read this. God’s witnesses continue to share the news of our ascended Savior. God uses us—our mouths, our prayers, our offerings given in thankful love—to spread that message.

**Easter 7**

Acts 1:15-26

Greed sneaks up on the unsuspecting soul. Judas was one of the Twelve. He had gone out and preached the word, healed the sick, and driven out evil spirits (see Mark 6:7-13). Yet he was filled with greed and stole from the disciples’ treasury (see John 12:4-6). His greed led only to despair and damnation. Be on your guard against all kinds of greed! Rejoice in the true treasure the Lord gives to you: the good news of Jesus. Take joy in the undeserved privilege of serving in the Lord in whatever position in which he has placed you. The 120 believers had the privilege of participating in the calling process through their prayers. Matthias was blessed to be called as the twelfth apostle.

1 John 4:13-21

We love because God first loved us. This phrase sums up our identity in Christ and supplies us with motivation to love. We love God who loves us, and we love one another even if they may not love us in return. What better reason do we need to be generous with God’s gifts and to be about his business as expressed through our thank offerings?

**Pentecost**

Ezekiel 37:1-14

Are your bones dry? Are you taking the time to soak in God’s Word for comfort and direction in this life? God gives generously of himself through his Word, that we who are his in Christ can be generous with that same Word of Life. Our offerings are just one way to be generous with his Word of Life for dry bones.

Acts 2:1-21

The pouring out of the Holy Spirit continues to take place wherever the Word and sacraments are being used. Evidence of the pouring out of the Holy Spirit is seen in people like us gathering for worship. Evidence of the pouring out of the Holy Spirit is seen in every worship service as we sing our hymns, give our offerings, confess our sins and our faith, and join in prayers. Evidence of the Holy Spirit is also seen when we go back out into the world and love our neighbors as ourselves. There is only one explanation for these type of responses—the pouring out of the Holy Spirit upon each one of us.

John 14:25-27

Motivation is everything. You eagerly do what you love. You drag your feet or even refuse when it comes to doing something you don’t want to do. Our sinful nature wants us to ignore serving the Lord with the first and best of our schedules, our abilities and efforts, and our wallets. Yet Jesus promises an Advocate who will empower us to serve him with nothing but our best. We don’t have to be afraid. The Holy Spirit will give us the strength to serve the Lord and will encourage us in the face of any resulting hardship.

**Holy Trinity**

Isaiah 6:1-8

You can understand the sheer terror of Isaiah. Who was he to see the high and exalted throne? Who was he to watch the seraphim? How could his eyes see the King? His unclean lips disqualified him. The same blessed angels come and touch his lips. His guilt is taken away. How can he not answer the summons of the Holy One of Israel? He volunteers for service, “Here am I. Send me!” The same Savior touches us with the holiness of grace. Forgiven, we volunteer, “Here am I. Let me serve!”

Romans 8:14-17

Both brothers were covered with grime and leaves, and had a large bandage on their foreheads. The reporter saw what was evident—both had fought the tornado together. “We held the wall even though a big branch fell on us,” they said, “but the wall survived. We saved the house!” Though weary and hurting, they were overjoyed because they had gone through it together. In sharing their suffering, they both reaped the joy of victory. Sometimes our stewardship of time and finances can seem unpleasant. There are other things we could have done with the money. There are other things we could have done with our time. Yet, when the sacrifice is over, we realize that, in going through it together, we have the joy of victory. When your sacrifices for Christ and his church are burdensome, remember that you will also share in the joy of knowing many have been added to God’s kingdom.

John 3:1-17
Through baptism we have a new life. We know the simple message that God loved us so much that he sent his one and only Son so that we will not suffer forever in hell, but have eternal life with him in heaven. This is the gospel he entrusts to us. We proclaim that gospel without worry about what kinds of results it might produce. We know that the Holy Spirit will produce the results when and where he pleases. “The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit.”

**Pentecost 2**

Deuteronomy 5:12-15

They fled Egypt. They raced through the Red Sea. They would wander through the desert. No wonder God wanted them to have rest. He did not only want to offer relief for their bodies. His Sabbath rest was aimed at their hearts. Understanding God’s mercy, they would “take a break” and take to remembering their caring God. Hearts today need that break, Sunday and every day, to recall God’s goodness. Hearts today need that Sabbath break to respond to God’s goodness.

2 Corinthians 4:5-12

Church work is not about us. Preachers don’t preach themselves. Servants don’t serve themselves. Giving offerings to the Lord is not giving to ourselves. We worship Jesus Christ as Lord. We expose the light of the gospel in this dark world. We are only dust, but what great dignity God has given us. God considers us as treasures in these jars of clay. As we carry around in these bodies the death of Jesus, we reveal his life as we let our lights shine and manage his blessings.

Mark 2:23-28

As you drive or ride along this week, pay attention to stop signs. Watch how other drivers react to a stop sign. Some drivers will do what police call on tickets a “rolling stop.” They will slow down, but never come to a complete stop. At creation God gave us a stop sign. It was called the “Sabbath,” which in Hebrew means “rest.” It was designed for Old Testament believers to be not just a day you rolled through but a day where you would come to a complete stop. Jesus put aside the Old Testament practice but we are to still honor the Sabbath by regularly taking time to be in the Word and to worship. It’s a temptation in our busy world to let this fall down the list of priorities, and without God’s Word the worries of the world begin to weigh heavily on us. Through all that Jesus accomplished, however, we have rest from our worries and a guarantee of peace with God. So enjoy your Sabbath rest—it’s a blessing from God!

**Pentecost 3**

Genesis 3:8-15

You can run, but you can’t hide. The primal pair tried running. They ate that “stupid piece of fruit,” but that was not just a stupid piece of fruit. It was God’s way of having them show their love for him. We can make many excuses for our foolish misuse of God’s gifts. We can even try to run and hide. With whatever we have, in whatever we do, we strive to serve faithfully and use God’s gifts wisely. We do that knowing that the Head-crusher has stomped out Satan and once again opened paradise.

2 Corinthians 4:13-18

“The grace that is reaching more and more people . . . causes thanksgiving to overflow,” says our reading. All the gifts and blessings we have come only from God’s grace. We deserve nothing but God’s condemnation, so any blessing is a result of God’s love for us and his unselfish giving. By using our gifts and blessings wisely, especially through the church to proclaim the message of Christ, more and more people are reached with the gospel. When people hear the liberating announcement that their sins are forgiven and that there is no restitution to be made, there is a sense of weight being lifted off the soul. The natural response is thanksgiving to God for his remarkable gift through Christ. Our thanksgiving takes the form of returning some of our private gifts to the church for public use. Then the cycle continues, and more and more people can hear about God’s grace.

Mark 3:20-35

“A house divided itself cannot stand.” Jesus said it first. Abraham Lincoln borrowed it in June 1858, campaigning at the Illinois State Capitol. Our hearts still can’t serve God and money. You can’t divide your allegiance between your Savior and Satan. Sometimes we need to stop pretending loyalty to God when our life and entertainment and finances speak otherwise. Destined for heaven, we want to seek first the kingdom, then “all these things will be given as well” (Matthew 6:33).

**Pentecost 4**

Ezekiel 17:22-24

God planted that shoot from Jesse. That giant Cedar grew. Birds came and found shelter. The Messiah bore fruit. God plants in his people faith in the Messiah. We are dry trees, but attached to the vine we receive life and sustenance from the Lord. “Oh, may the precious seed take root, spring up, and bear abundant fruit” (*Christian Worship*, 323:1).

2 Corinthians 5:1-10

With all the grace and forgiveness God has available for us, he still has expectations for Christians in conducting their own lives. Our reading closes with a word of judgment. God is concerned with how we conduct our daily lives. While it might be easy to ignore this physical life and concentrate only on the life to come, we still live in this world. We receive tangible gifts from God. We have a gospel message to manage. As Paul says, it would be better to forsake this life (give up the tent) and be clothed in our heavenly body, but he comes back to reality and instructs us in living this life for God. Christian stewards are charged with managing this life and all that is associated with it until we die or Christ comes the second time. We are not off the hook. And God does care how we manage. May our management of all of life and life’s resources be pleasing to him.

Mark 4:26-34

The kingdom started out small: a childless couple near Haran, a few prophets (who sometimes thought they were alone), a remnant, a handful of disciples. Through the work of God’s Spirit, the Word takes root and takes off. Who knows how far your little act of kindness will go in the mind of a stranger? Who knows what impact your random act of righteousness will leave? The kingdom of God is marching on through the Spirit of God working in you and through you. It is forcefully advancing. Forceful men and women not only hold on to it; our acts of faith further it.

**Pentecost 5**

Job 38:1-11

Things were not going well in the life of Job. He had suffered the loss of most of his possessions and experienced the death of his children. Then he lost his health. In frustration he questioned the wisdom of God. God defends his way of doing things. The God who determined every detail of this world at creation is the God who controls every detail of our lives today. Difficult times should not bring doubt to a child of God. They should move us to trust in the Lord all the more—with our possessions, lives, and salvation.

2 Corinthians 5:14-21

Christians are driven! Since the death of our old self, as new creations we are obsessed with living for him who died for us and was raised again. We daily try to lose the baggage of our selfish sinful nature. We rejoice that God has reconciled with us. He does not count our sins against us. We have to respond to that message. We want to share that relief. Our wretched life of greed and selfishness is gone. The new has come! Generosity rules!

Mark 4:35-41

How does a hurricane praise God? Not many years ago extreme drought in the Northeast during one summer was alleviated by the restoring, if heavy, rains of one hurricane remnant after another marching up the east coast. As creator and preserver of the world, God balanced things out by his rules established for weather. Those interviewed during the storms often said, “It’s all in God’s hands.” Whether or not they believed it, they were right. As Lord of all creation, God can control even the weather. It’s a reminder of his power. It’s a reminder of his care. As stewards of God’s world, we can’t do much about the weather, but we can manage the results and, in awe, praise the God whom even the wind and waves obey.