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.*

**Pentecost 6**

Lamentations 3:22-33

Jeremiah wrote his lament over the destruction of Jerusalem and the captivity of her people. In spite of these terrible events, he testifies that God still shows his love for his faithful people. Instead of being consumed in the anger of God, we receive new blessings every morning from our faithful God. He always stands ready to forgive and restore us when we repent of our sins. As we observe the Lord’s faithfulness to his promises, we are also moved to be faithful in our love for him.

2 Corinthians 8:1-9, 13-14

What does it mean to be rich? Today’s reading is a classic Scripture lesson on giving. But before we can be about the business of giving, we have to be good at receiving, and we don’t always do that very well. The Macedonians, held up as an example by Paul, understood the depth of God’s love for them. They recognized their riches through Christ. Now he reminds the Corinthians of what Jesus did for them: “For your sakes he became poor, so that you, through his poverty, might become rich.” When we consider what Christ gave up to come to earth, and what he suffered for us on the cross, God’s love becomes evident. In receiving this love, we become rich beyond measure, for there is no price we can put on the gift of eternal life. In response to such generous giving, we also learn to give generously.

Mark 5:21-24a, 35-43

Life often presents us with major problems. None is larger than the problem that faced Jairus. His twelve-year-old daughter was so sick that he sent for Jesus. His daughter died before Jesus arrived. Jesus said only three things in the account. He told Jairus, “Don't be afraid; just believe.” He told those mourning for this girl, “Why all this commotion and wailing? The child is not dead but asleep.” He told the dead girl, “Talitha koum! Little girl, I say to you, get up!” When we have problems in life, we know that Jesus has a solution for them, that with Jesus our problems are not as big as they seem and that we need to heed his invitation, “Don't be afraid; just believe.” Only faith in Jesus can take away our fears in our Christian lives, including our fears to give generously and to serve faithfully. When you face major problems, listen to Jesus when he says, “Don't be afraid; just believe.”

**Pentecost 7**

Ezekiel 2:1-5

God makes sure that his Word is proclaimed even when his people stubbornly refuse to listen. Ezekiel, who had been humbled by his vision of the glory of God, is now raised up to his feet by the Spirit. The Savior then tells him to go preach the Word whether or not the people listen. Ezekiel’s task was to make sure that God’s people knew a prophet was among them. Our task remains to be such stewards of the mysteries of God, faithful stewards of the gospel who let all people know that there are spokesmen for God among them.

2 Corinthians 12:7-10

When we think of the apostle Paul, we think of his conversion on the road to Damascus, his mission trips, the new churches he started, the lives he touched, his teachings, and his sound practical advice. We sometimes forget he did all these things despite “a thorn in the flesh.” Paul saw this thorn in the flesh as an obstacle for serving the Lord. He said it was from the devil and it tormented him. He prayed for healing more than once. God answered Paul’s prayer in words of strength for Paul and us. The Lord reminded Paul that he only needed God’s grace to carry out his ministry. What’s your thorn in the flesh—a lingering illness, a longtime physical problem, the impact of age? The Lord reminds us that, even with a thorn in the flesh, we can serve him powerfully and effectively—by the grace of God.

Mark 6:1-6

“We can’t do that!” can be a reaction in some congregations to establishing new ministries or planning for an expansion of facilities. We look to the past and say, “We tried that before and failed, so why try again?” As stewards of God’s gifts, we sometimes need to develop trust that God can work miracles of faith through us. We must not let the naysayers discourage us when God places a challenge before us, but trust him to provide the leadership and the resources to accomplish what he has for us to do. God’s promise of support for proclaiming his message of salvation should be encouraging to us. As stewards of the gospel, let us place our trust in the Lord and go in the direction he sets.

**Pentecost 8**

Amos 7:10-15

Jeroboam II of Israel followed in the sins of Jeroboam I even though he lived a century and a half later. Chief among those sins was golden calf worship at Bethel and Dan. God sent Amos to preach the downfall of Israel and Jeroboam II because of such sins. Amaziah, prophet at the false altar in Bethel, ordered Amos out of Israel and back to Judah. Amaziah wanted Amos to “earn his bread” there and “prophesy” there. It is interesting that the false prophet begrudged God’s true prophet the money he made as a prophet as much as he begrudged the message of Amos. We do not begrudge the money given to those who preach God’s Word. We gladly give our offerings to support the proclamation of the gospel among us.

Ephesians 1:3-14

Paul sings a song of salvation for us. He covers what God did for us in the eternity past in electing us. He adds what God does for us during the course of history in sending Jesus to shed his blood as a payment for sin and in calling us to faith. He points to what God will do for us in the eternity to come when he will glorify us. The good news is that he tells us, “You were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth.” These are words we like to hear: you are included. What a strong motivation for working, giving, and praying for the gospel ministry among us! We are not outsiders looking into the things of God. We are included! We are insiders who live in the things of God.

Mark 6:7-13

Imagine sending a child off on a trip to Europe with these instructions: “Take no luggage. Don’t pack any emergency food. Don’t take any money with you.” Preposterous! Yet Jesus sends out his disciples with instructions just like those. To leave on a journey to a faraway place with no provisions is either foolish or shows a great deal of trust that somehow everything will be provided. If we were to strike out on our own with little or no planning, the risk of failure would be high. But striking out in faith with God’s assurance of support is a good risk. The evangelists were probably shocked at Jesus’ instructions until they remembered who it was who was sending them out. Then trust kicked in. As stewards in God’s world, some of the things God challenges us to do seem risky. We look around and see no resources. But when it is God who says, “Move!” we can be sure he will provide the resources necessary. “If it is of men, it will fail,” the officials noted of the activity of early Christians in Acts, “but if it is of God, no one can stop it.” When God sends you, strike out in trust that he will also provide the resources.

**Pentecost 9**

Jeremiah 23:1-6

God’s solution for the false shepherds who scattered the sheep is to punish them and send new shepherds who are faithful to him and his Word. Chief among those new shepherds is his Son, the Good Shepherd. Jesus will gather his scattered people around his cross and will be our righteousness. Robed in Jesus’ righteousness, we are safe and secure in our faith and united together in our mission to preach the gospel as he gives us opportunities and means.

Ephesians 2:13-22

It is curious that a small wound in the body can cause death. A lead slug only a few millimeters in diameter can enter the body and the person dies. A knife wound only a few inches deep and confined to a small percentage of the total body is lethal. We all know the reason—the body works together as a unit. There is a relationship between every part and every other part. In the body of the church, you are an important part. The body may be able to live without you, but it certainly won’t be as strong. The church needs every member. Each congregation needs everyone to participate in using God’s gifts in support of the mission of the congregation. Your time, your abilities, and your finances, if missing, will be noticeable. Continue to be active in doing your part as a steward of God’s blessings in the church.

Mark 6:30-34

For a Christian “down time” is never “down time.” The twelve disciples had returned from their mission trip. The execution of John the Baptist weighed heavily on Jesus. The Savior invited his disciples to some “down time” across the Sea of Galilee. However, the crowds still came. In spite of the “down time,” Jesus’ compassion on these shepherdless people was stronger than his need for some rest and relaxation. So Jesus used his “down time” for preaching God’s Word to those who both needed it and desired it. Our compassion and faithful witness to the shepherdless does not end when vacation begins, when days off come around, or when we relax after work. We are always ready to do the Lord’s work, even during our “down time.”

**Pentecost 10**

Exodus 24:3-11

Fellowship with God is a wonderful thing. Moses, Aaron, Nadab, Abihu and the 70 elders experienced this fellowship by eating and drinking in God’s presence. Talk about a reason to now serve God with joyful hearts! As New Testament believers we understand that sacrificial system used in the Old Testament was one of many pictures pointing ahead to the perfect fellowship Jesus accomplished by his death. Because of Jesus we too have an intimate fellowship with God. This means we also have every reason and motivation to serve God with joy-filled hearts.

Ephesians 4:1-7, 11-16

The diversity of the church—the variety of the gifts the Lord bestows on its members—has one purpose: to build up the body of Christ. Full-time professionals and part-time volunteers all make proper use of time, talents, and treasures as they grow the church.

John 6:1-15

Your gifts to the church can be multiplied in service to the Lord. Often this takes the form of “matching funds.” A donor, a foundation, or an insurance company may step forward and challenge congregation members to support a cause with their gifts, and then matching funds are used to increase the final total. But look what happens when Jesus gets involved: the gifts are multiplied beyond anyone’s expectation. A boy’s lunch feeds thousands. How can this be? It’s God’s math. We like to subtract and divide. We seem to look at only what is left, or how it is going to be divided to support so many needs. But God likes to add and multiply. He takes meager resources, and in his miraculous way, adds his blessing and multiplies their effect. What your gift may accomplish is in the hands of the Lord.

**Pentecost 11**

Exodus 16:2-15

At a buffet restaurant each customer chooses an appropriately sized serving so that there is no leftover food to pick up from the tables. If there are lots of leftovers it means the customer demonstrated a lack of control and bad judgment. When God gave the Israelites manna for food, he promised to provide all the manna each person needed. But some doubted. They saw the delicate nature of the manna and how it appeared like frost. They came to the logical conclusion that such light nourishment would not be enough, so some gathered more than they could eat. But the excess manna spoiled, became insect-infested, and smelled horrible. God promises to give us “all that we need to support this body and life” (Martin Luther’s explanation to the First Article of the Apostles’ Creed). If we trust God’s Word, we can be satisfied in having what we need. “Take all you need,” says God, “but use all you take in service to my world.”

Ephesians 4:17-24

The world’s viewpoint and the child of God’s viewpoint of everything that God gives us are the exact opposite. The world sees wealth as a tool to indulge in any and every thing it wants. Such thinking will only lead to dead-end living—eternally. Conversely, the child of God has a completely different attitude. God’s children recognize the need to put off such a useless thought process and instead honor God with all that they possess, including his material gifts.

John 6:24-35

“The squeaky wheel gets the grease” is a phrase in our culture that defines importance. How do you determine what is important? Is it the same way that God determines what is important? How attuned are we as God’s children to knowing and acting on what God considers important? In our reading, the crowds were seeking Jesus according to their own definition of what was important. They followed him for his miracles and because he fed them. When you give your time and finances to the church, is it for the right reason? In the Old Testament, when people brought sacrifices to the Lord’s altar, their attitude was that they brought them with no strings attached. They simply turned the offerings over to the Lord for his use. Some were burned; some went to feed the priests and the Levites. When we bring our offerings to the Lord, are we willing to let them go and be used in service as the Lord directs, or do we want to keep some control over their use? In the right attitude, let God determine the priority in the use of our gifts. Then we will be giving for the right reasons.

**Pentecost 12**

1 Kings 19:3-8

It has been said, “When God lets us stumble; he does so that we may fall into his arms.” He does this that we might lose faith in our strength and employ his. All that we are, all that we have, and all that we accomplish is for the Lord and because of his strength. “We give thee but thine own, whate’er the gift may be; all that we have is thine alone, a trust O Lord from thee. And we believe thy Word, though dim our faith may be: whate’er for thine we do, O Lord, we do it unto thee” (Christian Worship 485:1,6).

Ephesians 4:30-5:2

There’s nothing like money to cause arguments, and this threat is even possible within a congregation. A wealthy member dies and leaves a large estate to the church resulting in wrangling over how to spend or invest the money. An expansion of facilities is proposed and the discussion over the cost and how to gather needed funds nearly dooms the project. Times are tight and the budget is not met, so discussions over priorities and where to cut become heated. God does not bless the church to cause divisions. Just as we give out of love, let us work together in love, prayerfully asking God to guide us in the use of these gifts within his Church.

John 6:41-51

Jesus speaks of food and nutrition. It is amazing what some folks do to take care of their bodies. They precisely measure out supplements and nutrients to mix with the food they eat. They meticulously plan their entire day around their exercise routine. There is certainly nothing wrong with caring for our bodies. Yet Jesus points out that if we only use our time to invest in the things for our body the result will be same for all: “yet they died.” Therefore the Savior instead urges us to invest our time and effort into eating living bread, that is, believing in him. Doing so means living forever.

**Pentecost 13**

Proverbs 9:1-6

The Scriptures make us wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. We make our lives busy with many things—especially in the summer—but through all of the noise of this world, Wisdom invites us to walk in the way of understanding. As a new school year begins, most churches will be offering a full plate of spiritual food for members in the form of Bible studies and other educational opportunities. May we use these opportunities to not only serve ourselves and our families but, like the maids in this reading, also invite others to come to God’s feast.

Ephesians 5:15-20

Society has always been at odds with the church. What the world wants is not in harmony with what the church teaches. If we think our society is anti-Christian, we only need to look back into history or to other places in the world to find societies and situations where the church suffers even more persecution. Yet we do not drop out of society in order to fulfill Christ’s mission. We manage our lives and our church in a way that gives a positive witness to society of what we believe. We can encourage one another in worship, in our meeting together to study the Word, in our fellowship. Our corporate witness is in how every member gives of self to support the common goals of the congregation: “always giving thanks to God the Father for everything.”

John 6:51-58

Saving faith is not merely a matter of believing in Jesus Christ as our highest moral example. Saving faith cannot be equated with taking hold of his ethics and applying them to one’s self. Saving faith is not trusting in Jesus as a leader. Saving faith is looking to the cross and seeing the flesh and blood offering Jesus made once for all that forgiveness might be secured. Christ gave his all for us. As we walk in newness of life, so we will put this faith into action. We will feast on the Bread of Life and make use of all the resources God has put at our disposal to share that Bread of Life with others that they too may realize that only Jesus offers Living Bread, which leads to eternal life.

**Pentecost 14**

Joshua 24:1-2, 14-18

When Joshua gave God’s people the choice of their lives, they responded with a beautiful confession of faith: “The LORD is our faithful God; far be it from us to be unfaithful to the One who will never let us down!” Yet, at the same time they were still holding on to the gods their forefathers worshiped (cf. vs. 14)! Such is the ongoing struggle for every child of God: to be faithful to him who saves or to that which cannot. Our confessions of faith are real, but so is our struggle. Let us remember the faithfulness of our Savior-God. He has proven himself in the past and will continue his faithfulness in the future. It is only by his promise that we remain faithful to him and faithful with his gifts.

Ephesians 5:21-31

The life of a child of God centers on Jesus and naturally leads to service. Marriage furnishes a unique way for God’s people to serve. For the husband such service is centered on a Christ-like love for his wife. Such service is unconditional and totally committed to the well-being of his wife. For the wife it means a service of Church-like submission to her husband. Such service is done willingly, not reluctantly, because a Christian wife understands the relationship between the church and Christ. Jesus is the head of the church and willingly sacrifices even his life.

John 6:60-69

Computer compression files are amazing. One little word can be the key to open compressed files that contain text, pictures, animation, and other wonders. But our computers cannot hold a candle to what can be compressed into one Word of God. One Word of God spoken or remembered can unlock the entire counsel of the Holy Spirit. God’s Word sustains life. There are no frivolous words of God. Each is life-giving and life-sustaining. There’s extraordinary power in each Word of God. God has provided you with his Word so that your spirit and life may be sustained. Just the one word, “Jesus,” unlocks the file of all he has done for you. A holy birth, a perfect life, undeserved death on the cross for your sake—all wrapped up in a word, a name. As God’s stewards it is important that we make the best use of this wonderful gift: the Word of God. Hear it, be in it, use it, and proclaim it often.