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 15**

Deuteronomy 4:1, 2, 6-8

After 500 years of promises, God is about to deliver to his people the land he swore on oath to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. But that isn’t even the best part. They had his Word and, through it, wisdom and understanding—even God himself! But jump ahead another 500 years: What good is the land? When Israel and Judah cared only about the gifts and turned away from the Giver, they were left with nothing. Only a wise and understanding people who listens to the Lord and trusts his promises can see that the Giver and Forgiver is the greatest prize. With him we have everything. Without him we are nothing.

Ephesians 6:10-20

The armor is unseen—and so is the enemy. The powers of this dark world hide all around us and quietly go to work in us. The visible blessings God gives are not evil, but the devil and his forces tempt us to use them for evil purposes while they themselves happily go unnoticed. Our only defense is the Lord and his mighty power. He clothes us in his invisible armor, which we put on only by his means of grace. He opens our eyes to see the forces that stand against us and their temptations that seek to topple us. He opens our eyes to see his mighty power, his gospel, his salvation, his peace—not so that we can entirely escape temptation, but so that we can stand against it. The desire and the courage to be godly stewards of visible blessings grow from our awareness of what is unseen and our trust in the Lord and in his mighty power.

Mark 7:1-8, 14, 15, 21-23

“Tradition, tradition!” sings Tevye in “Fiddler on the Roof.” Giving traditions abound in congregations everywhere. Some seek member pledges. Some always conduct a fall stewardship campaign. Even the way we take the offering in church can be a tradition that no one had better mess with. Our reading warns us that traditions need to be periodically evaluated to see whether they still get the results that please God and serve the church. Churches surely want to do things decently and in order, but tradition for tradition’s sake can send us in a wrong direction when it comes to understanding or teaching truths of Scripture. Conversely, traditions that bring honor and give a witness to Christ are to be retained. The question to ask is whether the tradition is one proclaimed or prescribed by Scripture, or whether it is a human invention for purely human purposes. And sometimes Scripture commands that we abandon rules or traditions that outlive their purpose or clash with a new command of God. The change in dietary habits for the Jews that Jesus suggests in our text was hard for them to swallow. We know from the book of Acts that Peter had the hardest time in giving up this tradition, but finally obeyed God’s command. As God’s stewards we want to be sure that our way of managing all of life is in harmony with God’s directives.

**Pentecost 16**

Isaiah 35:4-7a

In the previous chapter God lifts up Isaiah’s eyes to the Last Day and shows him the destruction of the wicked in graphic imagery. Now he shows him the Last Day from the believer’s perspective with imagery just as rich. His retribution will be in one hand, but his salvation in the other. “Don’t be afraid!” God comforts his people. At the last the creation will be restored to its Creator and Savior. The resources we devote to preparing people for that day are not in vain. They are not lost. We will never lack.

James 1:17-27

Take care of yourself. Don’t let the world pollute your thinking. Keep moral garbage out of your diet. Keep your spirit pure. This is good advice for Christian stewards. We are to be constantly evaluating our relationship to God and to others, especially to others who hold a common faith in the Lord. God’s Word serves as a mirror into which we can peer to examine ourselves and how we manage our lives for the Lord. We can then make the proper adjustments. God will bless such changes, our reading says. It also says that we are not only to know what we are to do, or to plan our actions, but to actually do them. For Christian stewards, the joy is in the doing, in the giving, in the serving. May your life always be one of service to God, the Church, and others.

Mark 7:31-37

Our Lord Jesus is not far away and out of touch. He is close and compassionate. Consider his care for this special-needs Gentile: He takes him away from the crowds so that the man can focus on him and so that he can focus on the man. He uses his fingers and his spit to communicate to the deaf-mute. He points him to the sky to show where the healing comes from. He is close. He is compassionate. And he heals. He remains just as close today and his compassion has not waned. He knows your needs—spiritual and physical—and he will provide.

**Pentecost 17**

Isaiah 50:4-10

In this third servant song we hear our Savior’s first-person description of his commitment to the Word of God and to the suffering by which he saves us. The pain is real, but he will not be deterred. Note how Paul places the servant’s words into the mouth of the believer in Romans 8:36. With the suffering servant now sitting at the right hand of God, we will not be disgraced. Let us not be discouraged. Whether we’re serving him with our money or our suffering or our lives, it will not be in vain. He will not leave us. Let us trust in the name of the Lord and rely on our God.

James 2:1-5, 8-10, 14-18

Favoritism treats other people like objects. Why would they treat the rich man well? Because they hoped to get something in return! Why would they treat the poor man poorly? Because he had nothing they wanted. Favoritism is a sin against the royal law to love your neighbor as yourself. It’s treating your neighbor like a rung on a ladder. Love, on the other hand, doesn’t play favorites. Love doesn’t view other people as opportunities to get, but every person as an opportunity to give. Love identifies my neighbor’s need. Then it goes to work to fill it. We love because God first loved us. He doesn’t play favorites. He has filled our needs in Jesus. He will continue to give us everything we need to show Jesus’ love in us.

Mark 8:27-35

What can you give in exchange for your soul? How much would you be willing to pay to get to heaven, that is, if it could be attained by purchase? “Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man,” we are told in Romans 5, “though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die.” Then Scripture turns right around and tells us “While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” How much is that worth? It should demand all our attention. There should never be a question of how much we owe God for his grace. So when Scripture suggests that we return to God a portion of what we have been given, it is not a burden, but a blessing.

**Pentecost 18**

Jeremiah 11:18-20

When Jeremiah prophesied, God’s Word did not return empty. It aroused the hatred and scheming of men intent on silencing him for good. Faithful stewardship always costs. We are poor preachers if we are not frank about the cost of discipleship. But through our giving we only become richer. Through it God teaches us to depend on him and shows us that he will not leave us high and dry. To you, O Lord Almighty, we commit our cause!

James 3:13-18

Look at the harvest of righteousness that the Lord sows through us. He begins by giving us true wisdom from heaven. It is the opposite of the worldly “wisdom” that prides itself in envy and selfishness. Examples of that foolishness abound all around us—and it rubs off on us! But God works through his Word to replace the world’s “wisdom” in us with his own. It is pure and selfless and it shows in our deeds. Thus the Lord shows the world his wisdom and peace through us. Through us he produces a harvest of righteousness. In other words, the good he works through us is not without effect. It produces results that will last.

Mark 9:30-37

Welcome the children! What a stewardship motivation! In Acts, Peter recalled this teaching when he told the crowds that salvation “is for you and for your children.” The church exists not only for those who partake of its message, services, and blessings now, but for your children and grandchildren. If someone had not been faithful generations ago and provided for the continuation of the preaching of the gospel message, you may not have heard it. If families had not banded together and, as good stewards, supported the ministry of your congregation in the past, where would you be today? Future generations yet unborn are relying on you to be faithful with the gifts and resources God gives.

**Pentecost 19**

Numbers 11:16, 24-29

When the Israelites grumbled, Moses felt the weight of it as if he were carrying the burden all alone. The Lord showed him in this Old Testament reading that he could place his Spirit upon many leaders, and even upon the “unauthorized.” Surprisingly effective service can be given by some from whom you least expect it. For not one of us has all of God’s gifts, but each of us should look for his God-given opportunities to serve while giving thanks for the gifts and services of others.

James 4:7-12 (and extending through 5:6)

No rich person wants to hear the condemnation of James in our reading for today. Neither did the rich man who tore down his barns to build new and bigger ones (Luke 12) want to hear the condemnation of Jesus. Being rich is not the problem. We are all extraordinarily wealthy when compared to most of the world. The key is in James’ words, “You have lived in . . . self-indulgence.” From the Garden of Eden, when Adam and Eve wanted to have control and to have God’s role for themselves, the big sin has been selfishness. Think about it. Selfishness is probably the root of every problem you encounter in relationships both inside and outside of the church. It is also the reason why we rebel against God’s expectation that we manage all that he gives to us for his purposes. We’d rather have it for ourselves. We are all convicted by the words of James. Let us all continually seek God’s forgiveness for selfish mismanagement of all of life, and continue to seek to do his will.

Mark 9:38-50

How do you tell who are believers? Jesus says here by what they do for Christ. Simply giving someone a drink of water in Christ’s name is a show of saving faith. How do people tell that we are believers? Are our actions in line with our faith? We certainly all have been blessed with more than water to share in Christ’s name, but do we share it? Do we help those in need, or are we more concerned about our being inconvenienced? We are the most blessed people on earth—we have the eternal riches of heaven waiting for us. May people come to know our Savior and the riches that are waiting for them, by coming to know us and our Christ-inspired generosity.

**Pentecost 20**

Genesis 2:18-24

When God created Eve he created the family unit—a unit through which he chooses to bless his people with sexual happiness, companionship, and children. What a blessing a family is. Whether you are married or not; whether you have children or not; you are part of a family—both your earthly family, but more importantly your heavenly Father’s family, through which you receive forgiveness of sins, eternal life, and salvation. In light of God’s blessing of family, may each of our families strive to serve our heavenly Father better. May we be better husbands, better wives, better sons and daughters, and better fathers and mothers. May we be better stewards of the gifts he gives to us and our families. May we teach better stewardship to our children. May we model better stewardship to our spouse. In this way, our Father who blessed us with family and also made us a part of his family will be praised.

Hebrews 2:9-11

“God, for whom and through whom everything exists.” This phrase in our reading for today sums up the doctrine of God’s creation and preservation. It also points out again for us that God is the owner and ultimate ruler over all things. And if Christ is our brother, then we are all God’s children, and, as Romans 8:17 says, “heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ.” An heir receives the property of the father. God, in his grace, has already distributed to you a good portion of his property. You have gifts and talents that allow you to be a productive person and earn a living and serve others. You have possessions to manage. You have the message of salvation to share. As you live your life, these and all the other manifestations of God’s grace in your life are on loan from the Owner. The proof is that they are all “recalled” (the Greek term used when the rich man in Luke 12 died) by God at the time of death. So, while we live, let us make the best use of what God entrusts to us to manage.

Mark 10:2-16

In our society, with its casual attitudes toward marriage and divorce, Jesus has strong guidance for us to see that such attitudes adulterate God’s intentions for a man and a woman in marriage. Perhaps the chief scandal in divorce is the diminished ability of one or both parents to bring their children to Jesus for his blessing. One of the greatest “gifts” we can offer to our Lord is being able to bring back to him our children—the special blessings he’s entrusted to us as parents.

**Pentecost 21**

Amos 5:6, 7, 10-15

In this Old Testament reading, Amos sounds out a call to repentance with inescapable social implications. God’s people are called to turn from attitudes and actions that result in injustices and to seek good, not evil, for others. What an opportunity we have, living in this sinful world, to give a godly witness of what it means to rightly make use of the blessings God has given to us as his stewards!

Hebrews 3:1-6

To us it seems like there could be little doubt that Jesus is greater than Moses. It’s a “no brainer.” But yet this text says much to us today, for we too are tempted to put other things and people ahead of our Savior. The writer uses the example of not giving more honor to the house than to the builder, but how often don’t we give more honor to the blessing than to the Giver of those blessings? We fall into the same traps and the same sins as did those first century Christians. And the remedy is the same as well: “Fix your thoughts on Jesus.” Look to Jesus for forgiveness of your sins. Look to Jesus for the strength to keep your priorities straight, ensuring that Jesus always gets first place in your lives.

Mark 10:17-27

Jesus is picking on the rich again! Why is it so hard for rich people to enter the kingdom of God? A clue is in verse 22: “At this the man’s face fell. He went away sad, because he had great wealth.” The rich man couldn’t get past the time he had to spend on securing, investing, and spending his money to give it all up to follow Jesus. Money and possessions, Jesus tells us throughout the New Testament, are an all-consuming burden. Managing riches for self gets in the way of stewardship—managing everything for God’s purposes. I suspect the rich young man didn’t enjoy his wealth nearly as much as he enjoyed wielding the power it afforded him. As you examine your life in the light of this lesson of Jesus, get to the bottom of it: Is it wealth and possessions that you enjoy, or the managing of your resources? As God’s stewards, our managing is directed toward what God would have us do. This frees you from the burden of wealth.

**Pentecost 22**

Hebrews 4:9-16

There is not a hint about money in this text from Hebrews chapter 4, yet it is one of the first things that comes to my mind when I read it. When I read that, “Nothing in all creation is hidden from God’s sight; everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account,” I think of my well-hidden greed and my secret covetousness. And I realize it’s not so well-hidden or so secret. God sees it. He sees my anguish over writing out my weekly offering check. He sees my sinful reasoning for not giving more. He sees when I am blessed with more yet my giving remains the same. He sees those sins and many more. He also sees that I need a Savior and he sent me one. So when I do have to give an account, it won’t be of my sins, it will be of Jesus’ righteousness. Praise be to the God who sees everything!

Mark 10:35-45

How easily we forget that there is no place in the kingdom for lording it over those around us! Again and again Jesus teaches us that we are called to serve, imitating his loving service. May this portion of God’s Word serve as a reminder for us to humbly acknowledge the gifts he’s given us and to use them in the service of others.