

Sermon for Twenty-Third Sunday after Pentecost

Date: November 17, 2019

Location: St. John's Lutheran Church, Austin, MN

Old Testament: Deuteronomy 8:11-20

Epistle Reading: Colossians 3:23-25

Gospel Reading: Matthew 25:14-30

Sermon Text: Matthew 25:14-30

Sermon Title: What is Stewardship?



Introit: Psalm 49:2,7,8,15-19; Antiphon: Psalm 49:1

Hymns:

LSB 785 – We Praise You, O God

LSB 783 – Take My Life and Let It Be

LSB 786 – Lord of All Good

Distribution:

LSB 789 – Praise and Thanksgiving

LSB 788 – Forgive Us, Lord, for Shallow Thankfulness

(Tune: LSB 878)

Liturgy:

Divine Service: IV, p. 203



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Text: Matthew 25:14-30

Jesus said: The kingdom of heaven is like a man going on a trip. He called his servants and entrusted some money to them. He gave one man ten five dollars, another two thousand dollars, and another one thousand dollars. Each was given money based on his ability. Then the man went on his trip.

“The one who received five thousand dollars invested it at once and doubled his money. The one who had two thousand dollars did the same and also doubled his money. The one who received one thousand dollars went off, dug a hole in the ground, and hid his master’s money.

After a long time the master of those servants returned and settled accounts with them. The one who received five thousand dollars brought the additional five thousand. He said, ‘Sir, you gave me five thousand dollars. I have doubled the amount.’

His master replied, ‘Well done! You are a good and faithful servant! You proved that you could be trusted with a small amount. I will put you in charge of a large amount. Come and share your master’s happiness.’

The one who received two thousand dollars came and said, ‘Sir, you gave me two thousand dollars, and I’ve doubled the amount.’

His master replied, ‘Well done! You are a good and faithful servant! You proved that you could be trusted with a small amount. I will put you in charge of a large amount. Come and share your master’s happiness.’

Then the one who received one thousand dollars came and said, ‘Sir, I know that you are a hard person. You harvest where you have not planted and gather where you have not scattered any seeds. I was afraid, so I hid your one thousand dollars in the ground. Here is your money!’

His master responded, ‘You evil and lazy servant! If you knew that I harvest where I have not planted and gather where I have not scattered, then you should have invested my money with the bankers. When I returned I would have received my money back with interest. Take the one thousand dollars away from him! Give it to the one who has the five thousand! To all who have, more will be given and they will have more than enough, but from the one who has little, even what he has will be taken away. Throw this useless servant outside into the darkness. People will cry and be in extreme pain there.’

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Grace to you, and peace, in Jesus' holy name. Amen.

Many of you have heard of C.S. Lewis. In his book titled, "Mere Christianity" he says:

Every faculty you have, your power of thinking or of moving your limbs from moment to moment, is given you by God. If you devoted every moment of your whole life exclusively to His service, you could not give Him anything that was not in a sense His own already.

Today being Stewardship Sunday, we might be inclined to ask, "What does Christian stewardship look like in our lives today?" Unfortunately many Christians only associate the idea of stewardship with sermons they have heard about church budgets, building programs and prying or guilting money out of people.

Stewardship should be about something much more than that. It is where the concepts of faith, work, and economics come together. A fairly well known author¹ states there are four important principles about biblical stewardship we need to understand:

1. The principle of ownership.

In Psalm 24 we read:

The earth is the LORD's, and everything in it,
the world and all who live in it.

In the beginning God created everything and put Adam and Eve in the Garden to work it and to take care of it.² It is clear that people were created to work, and that work is the stewardship, the care, of all creation which God has given us. This is a fundamental principle of biblical stewardship. God owns everything. God made everything. We are the managers or administrators, acting on His behalf.

So stewardship expresses our respect for all that God has made for us, and stewardship is the administration of everything God has placed under our control. Stewardship is the commitment of one's self and one's possessions to God's service, recognizing that we do not have the right of control over our property or ourselves.

Deuteronomy 8:17 speaks what we sometimes say and often think:

My power and the strength of my hands
have produced this wealth for me.

¹ Bill Peel – The High Calling, in an essay entitled Leadership Is Stewardship.

² Genesis 2:15

But Deuteronomy 8:18 gives us good counsel to think otherwise. It says:

Remember the LORD your God,
for it is he who gives you the ability to produce wealth.

2. The principle of responsibility.

Responsibility is best understood as this:

God gives us “all things richly to enjoy,” but nothing is ours. Nothing really belongs to us. God owns everything; we are responsible for how we treat it, and what we do with it. While we complain about our rights here on earth, the Bible constantly asks, ‘What about your responsibilities?’ Owners have rights; stewards have responsibilities.³

We are called as God’s stewards to manage that which belongs to God. While God has graciously entrusted us with the care, development, and enjoyment of everything He owns, as his stewards we are responsible to manage His holdings well, and according to His desires and purposes.

It is our place to read His Word, understand and learn His ways and will, and carry out that will in the stead and by the command of God. The foremost being, sharing that Word, will, love and salvation with everyone around us.

3. The principle of accountability.

A steward is one who manages the possessions of another. We are all stewards of the resources, abilities and opportunities that God has entrusted to our care, and one day each one of us will be called to give an account for how we have managed what the Master has given us.

This is the message taught by the Parable in our Gospel reading for today.⁴ God has entrusted authority over Creation to us, and we are not allowed to rule over it as we see fit. We are called to exercise our dominion under the watchful eye of the Creator, managing His creation in accord with the rules He has put in place. He is the master, He is the owner, we are the stewards of His property.

Like the servants in the parable we will be called to give an account of how we have administered everything we have been given including: our time, money, abilities, information, wisdom, relationships, and authority.⁵

³ Bill Peel – The High Calling, in an essay entitled Leadership Is Stewardship.

⁴ Matthew 25:14

⁵ Matthew 25:19

We will all give an account to the rightful owner as to how well we managed the things He has entrusted to us. The most important being sharing His salvation which we are called to invest in other's souls. If we are not doing that we are not doing anything useful, and we are not the Church.

4. The principle of reward.

In Colossians 3:23-24 Paul writes:

Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving.

The Bible shows us in the parables of the Kingdom that faithful stewards who do the master's will with the master's resources can expect to be rewarded incompletely in this life, but fully in the next.

We all should long to hear the master say to us what he says in Matthew 25[:21]:

Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things, I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!

As Christians, especially in these new and modern times, we need to embrace this larger biblical view of stewardship, which goes beyond budgets and projects. We should see stewardship as it connects everything we do to what God is doing in the world. We should be faithful stewards of all God has given us within the opportunities He provides to glorify Him, serve the common good, and further His Kingdom.

All of this with a primary focus on bringing the message of salvation to those lost souls. Isaiah proclaims:

The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shone.⁶

That is the task to which we have been given stewardship. Which servant will you be? Will you invest the resources God has given to you, and show a return for your work, or will you bury the precious gift of salvation and keep it for yourself planning only to turn it in at the end, selfishly, for your own reward?

The parable tells us what God expects us to do. Jesus makes His plan clear when He says”

6 Isaiah 9:2

Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.⁷

As we've been exploring over the last few Sundays, Jesus will return. At His return, what will He find? Each of us will stand before Him and each of us will be measured. How will we measure up? The Gospel is not something to be kept private. It is something that is to be invested and shared. As we invest in the salvation of others we are being good stewards of God's most precious possession, His children. May Gods instill in all of us a desire to do that well.

In Jesus' name.

Amen.