

## **Nov. 14, 2021. Stewarding Sunday**

Stewarding Sunday... Jesus is exceedingly clear and succinct about this. He says, 'No one can serve two masters. You either serve God or you serve greed.' ... Amen. Any questions?

Since you want a little bit more....

Jesus, almost pounds this topic in the gospels, stories, tales, parables...

Remember the rich farmer, who kept getting more grain and he wanted more barns to hold it all in? And then, that night, he got the word, 'Fool, you die tonight!' How much is all that worth?

Or, the story of the rich man and Lazarus, the beggar, at the gate. And nearly every day, the rich man gave him crumbs. I mean, almost every day he got crumbs! And then they both died, and the roles get reversed. Lazarus's is feasting in the heavenly eternal banquet, and the rich man is in the bowels of hell, begging for drops of water. 'Send Lazarus! Give me a drink.' And God says, 'There's this chasm between us, my friend. I don't know how it shall be crossed.'

Does that remind you of (perhaps) inequality in our day when seven people on this planet have more wealth than half of the earth's population?

Zacchaeus, the tax collector--they were scoundrels--we put them down because they're all thieves. That's how you make a living, right? And when somebody wanted to repent, the law was to restore twice over. But Zacchaeus in the presence of Jesus gets it, and he says, 'I'm going to pay back everyone I stole from four times over.'

Perhaps you've heard of this Prosperity Gospel that's going around the country these days. It plays well in Dallas, and Hollywood, [and] in Boca Raton. And here's the core message: 'God wants you rich.' That's it. The offense is unbelievable. Claiming Jesus ever said that is beyond fathoming, and talk about a chasm, right? Wow!

So stewards are connectors. We connect gospel values with daily realities...and so we come to see goods as not only raw materials gathered together. Goods are gifts. They are temporary. They're meant to generate life, especially in the service of others. The early Christian community designed itself around sharing, so that all could be provided for and none fell through the cracks.

We're living in a time of great and dire crisis, and this gap is unbelievably immense. Stewarding Sunday is not really about meeting the church budget. It's a day to explore:

Are we using our resources wisely?

And in a caring fashion?

For the good of our families, yes, and others.

And yet I need to say this day, that in light of Covid during this last year and a half, the Church Council and I are deeply grateful. We have been overwhelmed by the consistency and the constancy of the giving which all of you have provided during this time of crisis.

Yes, PPP loans were received twice; we needed them. But there have also been astounding gifts given from some of you, and friends around the country. So, it's kind of a miracle that we're here today. And on behalf of the Council I am saying, 'Thank you. Thank you for caring and committing to this congregation.'

And...we're living in a time now where sustaining life on this earth, and sustaining the very earth itself, has become a question mark. This is absurd! The enormity of the greed, the relentless greed, to exploit people and earth can't be fathomed. We're ready to destroy our own home. It's happening. And the next generation is terrified. Have you been seeing these reports? They're afraid they won't have a future. Afraid they won't have a planet, and they're terrified of many of us, because the older generation appears to be indifferent.

The Bible calls this 'chaos', a storm threatening disorder, which cannot be measured or managed. And the Bible is far more concerned about chaos than sin and guilt. I hope that's a little relief to some of you. But if you really understood the scriptures are all about this chaos, and these times, which keep coming and washing over humanity. See, we turn sin and guilt into a little religious game. We like that one. We can manage that one. But this is the overwhelming absurdity of life: people who destroy themselves, and their own communities.

Now, to be clear, science uses the word chaos in a whole other context. Alright? Science is talking about the chaos of universe, and its formation, and the cosmic evolution, and the subatomic realm, all the randomness of things which are going on constantly. It's perfectly fine. It's helpful. It's marvelous.

But when the scriptures and preachers use the word chaos, we are talking about a disorder of a magnitude beyond anything we can control. It is the intimidation, and the threat of fear and anxiety, paralyzing people as if there's no center and everything is disintegrating. Where do we find a foothold? Which is why Jesus said in his time, [Matt. 24:37] 'As in the days of Noah, (you remember, deep in the past), so this present generation wants to live in frivolity and superficiality, pretending that no storm or flood is coming.'

You can't serve God and greed. So stewards and connectors cannot save the world, but we can focus our energy on the light, on the healing, on the hope, wherever it is emerging, no matter how small or great. That's why prayer is so important, to keep our hearts focused on what matters. As Jesus—and Martin Luther said--'Where your treasure is, that's where your heart will be also.'

A couple of years ago, I was in seminary. And in those days, my teaching-parish assignment was at the Church of the Holy Comforter in the ghettos of St. Louis, the projects nearby, heavy-duty. You imagine every kind of crime possible. Members of the church were black and white, totally impoverished. They had had sons and daughters murdered, had sons and daughters in prison--slightly different than our congregation... Sometimes.

And I would drive Ella to church. She was a poor white woman--what we call 'white trash, missing resources, and tough times. Frankly. Ella had a stench about her. I'd drive her to church, as I said, and even in the middle of winter, I'd roll down the window and breathe out the window. It was so bad. Sunday after Sunday, it was bad.

Well, it was this season of the church year, approaching Thanksgiving, and Ella stands up during announcements one morning and was called on. 'Yes, what would you like to share?' And she says, 'You know, I can't imagine--because we're supposed to, so why wouldn't ...? It seems like we'd have to. Thank you,' and she sits down.

And...what?

So Gene, the pastor, who's a mentor of mine, asked her a couple questions. 'Now what is this about?' And she says, 'Well, that Thanksgiving thing... you read, so yeah, I read it. And he says, 'Oh, you mean in the newspaper?' 'Yeah. Yeah.' 'Oh, okay,' Gene says, 'What Ella is talking about is that there's an invitation for a national fast this Thanksgiving, and everybody's invited to fast, and then give the

money that you would spend on the Thanksgiving meal to various Church resources, who will distribute those funds to the poor so they can eat this year.' And Ella said, 'Yeah, right.'

And Harold, the president of the congregation, who is in his 70s--I mean, he was old--Harold stands up. 'Well, then I move the congregation fast.' And he sits down, and the congregation goes, 'Um hum. That's right. Amen. Amen.'  
And they all fasted.

I am screaming inside of myself, 'You don't get it, friends. This is backwards. We're fasting for you!' But there are other dimensions that they are aware of: '*Blessed are the poor. The reign of God is theirs.*'

And they knew that you cannot serve God and greed at the same time.  
Amen.

The peace which surpasses all human understanding, keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.  
Amen.