

Sermon 24a 2017: A Stewardship of the Presence of God Through our Lives

Introduction: A Different Kind of Stewardship

During this season of the fall financial stewardship campaign,

The Gospel lesson for today provides an obvious opportunity for a sermon

For a sermon about our financial giving to God; it even mentions money;

And I admit that I've taken that cue several times over the years

To talk about what it is we owe God in terms of our money and our lives.

It's an important story on many levels, not the least of which it focuses our attention

On struggling with the question of what do we owe this God

Who has given us life, gifts, forgiveness and immortality.

But for those of you who are longing for a financial stewardship only sermon today,

And I figure that's about five people in all of St. David's Church,

I'll have to disappoint you; and allow you to go home

And ponder for yourself what it is you can give God this coming year;

And may we all be generous in our giving because it's as important for us

As it is important for God and God's purposes in the world.

Instead, I want to use the other scriptures to talk about a different kind of stewardship;

A stewardship that includes financial giving, but goes far beyond our pledges and gifts;

A stewardship that has much more to do with an overall approach to our living;

Much more to do with being awake to our daily lives and our life's purpose

Awake to making a difference as God's representatives

To other people who are looking for real meaning, real life, hope;

For other people who are looking for God in their lives.

I want to talk this morning about a lifestyle of living and giving that allows God

To use you and me for God's purposes;

Living and giving in a way that allows God to touch us with His grace and love;

Living and giving in a way that let's others experience God's love from us.

Because God chooses to draw others close to Him through people like you and me;
And we are called to live our lives expecting that God will use us in some way;
To draw others to the life and the love of God we are coming to know.

Conscious and Unconscious Stewardship

Now, once we choose to offer our lives over to God;
This overall stewardship of living and giving can be conscious or unconscious.
And being conscious stewards means we're looking for opportunities
To use our gifts for God on behalf of others;
Looking for moments when we can act on God's behalf to help someone
And to let them know that God cares for them and loves them.

We practice conscious stewardship when we set aside part of what God has given us
To make a pledge, to spend time teaching, to sing in the choir, to feed the homeless,
To decide to live and give for God in some intentional way.

A few years ago I was with one of our parishioners who waited anxiously in the lounge
Outside an operating suite, where her husband was having serious surgery.

After too many hours the surgeon came out to talk with her.
She explained that the operation went very well,
But that they had unexpectedly found cancer;
And even though they think they got it all;
Her husband would have to undergo chemotherapy and radiation.

The surgeon returned to the operating room and the wife slumped down in a chair,
Weeping over the shock and the fear of what might come next for her husband
What would happen to their family if the worst should come about.

There was a woman cleaning that waiting room who witnessed this exchange
And in a moment of conscious compassion and Christian love
She put down her cleaning materials to cross the room toward us;

She sat down and put her arms around the weeping wife and rocked her like a child;
And whispered, "God loves you. Everything will be alright."

And after a moment or two, the woman got up and left the room,
Leaving the wife changed with a sense of peace that she was not alone;
And with a certainty that she had been touched by God directly, personally
Touched through this stranger who just happened by.

That would be a conscious moment when we remember the stewardship of our lives,
When we remember that who we are and what we have are for God's use;
And that would also be the church in Thessalonica;
A group of people practicing a conscious overall stewardship of their life as a church.

These Thessalonian Christians were some of the first Christians St. Paul helped convert;
And they never forgot the message of hope and promise Paul left with them;
They established a reputation for living and giving with such generosity
That they helped Paul spread the Gospel throughout the world.

That's the conscious stewardship of our lives, but other times it's unconscious;
Sometimes, once we've given our lives over to God,
We don't even know that God is using us to help someone
Somehow, we just happen to be there.

I have good friend in Virginia named John Garst
Who has worked with youth groups most of his adult life;
Teaching Sunday School and showing up at evening meetings
To play around and to help young people come to know God.

He really knows his Bible, but what makes him effective as a Youth group advisor
Is the fact that he keeps showing up;
And one Christmas Eve, oh by the way,

John rarely attends on Christmas Eve and Easter,

Because the people who don't come very often take up all the seats

He says it makes him mad that he has to look for a seat.

But one Christmas Eve, John was there and we were talking after the service

When a young man of college age came up to John

And took his hand and said,

“Mr. Garst, you've been a very important person in my life

And I want to thank you for helping me have the courage to go to college.”

Before John could say anything, the young man melted into the crowd;

And, having never seen this young person before, I asked John, ‘Who was that?’

And John said, “I have no idea, I don't think I've ever even seen him before,

But whatever I did, it must have been pretty good, huh?”

That would be the unconscious moment when we didn't recognize

That God has been using us to help another person

And we see this unconscious approach in the reading from Exodus this morning

When God explains to Moses that as close as we are with one another;

You can't see me face to face;

You can't see what I'm doing in your life going forward;

But only after the fact.

God isn't always going to show us how He is calling us to be good stewards of our lives;

And what we live and give for others and will play out in ways we can't see at the time;

But God will show us after we have given of ourselves;

God will show His glory at work after He's passed by.

For God uses people like you and me every day for His purposes,

God uses people like you and me to reveal His presence in the lives of others,

When we're living and giving every day with God.

Living and Giving Ourselves

One of the most wonderful aspects of the Christian faith

Is the promise that God has a personal interest in your life and my life;

That God cares for each of us and wants us to know with certainty

That He is here and that He is making a difference in our lives;

Making a difference with His own time, talent and treasure;

I like to think of this as God at His best;

Master of the universe, but involved with you and with me.

We glimpse it in creation in a beautiful sunrise, in the coloring leaves of fall;

We hear it in the stories of Jesus' life

And when we remember Jesus' death and resurrection;

But we know it most clearly when God bends down

And works through people like you and me

To make His presence and purposes known.

And God intends to use you and me every day, in some way,

By the stewardship of our lives;

By the choices we make in our living for and our giving to others;

Choices that involve giving over to God all that we are and all that we have;

That's why we make a financial pledge each year, too, by the way,

We give money so that God can use it for God's purposes.

We will never know all of the effects of our living and giving for God this side of heaven;

Never know how God has used us to help others and reveal His love;

And other times it will be so obvious that our hearts will burn with gladness

And we'll literally know God's pleasure for what we've done

And look for ways to do more.

But whether we're aware of how God is using us or not,

I invite you this day to take hold of the stewardship of your life.

I invite you to take hold of how you live and how you give

So that you may know God's presence and grace in your life;

So that others may come to know the love that you know;

And so that God may work His good purposes out in you

And through you every day of your life.

The stewardship of our lives is a conscious and an unconscious commitment

To a way of living and giving with a purpose in all areas of our lives;

A stewardship that is our choice, but one that is empowered by the Holy Spirit.

If you and I will give our lives over to God each day

Then consciously and unconsciously

You and I will come to know the great love of God for us;

And through us, others will come to know

The love and grace and hope and purpose available to everyone

Through living and giving every day with God.

Amen.