

## Stewardship: It's a Spiritual Thing

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As the passage from Luke was read this morning, a few of you might be wondering, “Haven’t we heard that passage already?” The answer is yes. We’re going to revisit this passage a little bit today; this parable where Jesus tells the story of a Pharisee and a tax collector. And we’re revisiting it because there are so many different lessons we can pull from it.

When we talked about this passage a few weeks ago, we looked at it with the question, “How do we approach God?” Do we approach God like the Pharisee and say, “Yay! Woo! Look at me! I’m so good!” Or do we approach God like the tax collector and say, “I know I messed up. Please forgive me.” Where is the humility and where can we boast?

Today we’re looking at this passage from Luke from a stewardship standpoint. This is our stewardship month. We are gearing up and hearing the stories of how our church touches lives, why the church is important to us, and how we are going to support the church.

A lot of times, when we hear that word “stewardship,” we start to cringe a little bit. It’s that sense of, “Oh no, they’re gonna ask me for money.” *Well, yes, we are... and at the same time... no, not quite. The thing is, when it comes to stewardship, it’s not just about money. Stewardship does include a financial aspect. But when we’re talking about stewardship, we’re also talking about its spiritual aspect. How do we give to God? In that spiritual aspect, it’s less about money and more about relationship.*

*I’m going to say that again. Faithful stewardship is less about money, and more about your relationship with God. Stewardship is less about what goes in the offering plate, and more about what you are able to offer through faith.<sup>1</sup>*

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<sup>1</sup> Due to a technological malfunction, the italicized section of text is missing from the video recording of the worship service.

So, let's look at the parable again. When the Pharisee came into the temple and prayed, his prayer began with, "Lord, thank you that I am not like other people." Right there, right off the bat, there is a division. There is a division the Pharisee is setting up between himself and the people God would have him minister to. Right in this first line of the Pharisee's prayer, we're already seeing an example of bad stewardship. "I'm thinking about myself and how great I am and who cares about everybody else. I just need to be better than them." This is not an attitude that comes out of a good relationship.

Then the Pharisee continues with "I am not a sinner. I am not an evildoer. I am not an adulterer. I give a tenth of everything I earn, not just what the law requires. Look at how good I am. And I am so much better than that tax collector."

The problem is now we're getting into boasting. Now the Pharisee is saying, "This is why I'm so good. This is why God should look at me... Look at me! Look at me! I give everything I'm supposed to give!"

Except for one thing... "What does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk **humbly** with you God" (Micah 6:8).

Humility is still required in stewardship. Because when we start announcing, "Hey, I give all of this. I do all of this. I am all of this. Look at me! Look at me! Look at me!" it's no longer about God. That gift that we can give; if we say, "Oh, I'm gonna put \$300 in the offering plate. See this," it's not about God anymore. That's about ego and self and look how good I am.

So, as we go into this stewardship month, the one thing I want you all to remember; the one thing I want you all to pray about and meditate on is this: Where is the gift coming from? Is it something you have prayed about? Is it something you have been in a conversation with God about? When you give that gift, do you give it out of ego, and an attitude of, "this is how good I am"? Or do you give it out of an attitude of, "Lord, God, this is my gift. Please use it as you will."

Now that brings up the question of the tax collector. In the parable the tax collector didn't bring anything. The tax collector didn't offer any money or anything. It was just a simple prayer, "Lord, forgive me, a sinner."

This also goes to stewardship. If you want that relationship with God, if you wanna be open to what the Spirit is telling you, if you want to trust in God to say, "This is what I want you to give. This is what I want you to do. Don't worry about it cause I'm gonna be with your every step of the way. I will provide..." In order to be open to that, we need to go to God with that same spirit the tax collector showed. That same spirit of, "Lord, have mercy on me, a sinner. I know I've messed up in ways I probably don't even realize. I know there is so much more I can be doing. But, Lord, I need your guidance. Lord, I need your help. Lord, forgive me and walk with me." I can guarantee you, that prayer will bring more hope and more blessing and more usefulness through the Spirit of God, than however much money we can put in an offering plate.

To further exemplify this, the passage from Acts begins very simply. Peter and John were walking up to the temple. It was the 3:00 hour of prayer and they were about to enter through the Beautiful Gate where a lame beggar had been laid by his friends.

In that time, this was part of the culture. Society was setup in such a way where you were expected to give alms to the poor. This was how the poor and lame made their living, by the charity of those who were able to give. It was completely accepted in this culture.

In today's society we've gotten away from this idea. Driving along in the city and we see folks holding up signs, trying to explain their situations, just looking for anything to help, I know I for one feel guilty when I have nothing to offer. I'll admit, part of that is a stigma of not trusting folks. We know there are people who get creative in how they are deceitful. There are folks who take advantage of others' generosity. They're out there and they're making \$50,000 a year by begging.

It happens in Chicago. People ride the “L” train all day long begging for money. At the end of the year, when they do their taxes, they can say I made this much money. It’s a little deceitful.

Now, that’s not to say everyone who begs is trying to deceive. Many folks really are in dire need of the aid we can offer out of our generosity. As we’re talking about the beggar in Acts, this is the situation he’s in. He is lame. He can’t walk; therefore, he can’t work to earn wages. He has no choice but to depend on the alms he gets from the charity of others. It was an accepted part of society then. You take care of the poor. There are so many Bible passages that instruct us to take care of the poor. Take care of the widow. Take care of the orphan. Jesus even gives a whole parable about how folks who ministered to him by caring for the hungry, the thirsty, the stranger, the naked, the sick, and imprisoned were blessed and welcomed into heaven (Matthew 25:31-46).

Now let’s get back to Peter and John, who are heading up to the temple and they see this lame beggar. For the beggar to be there is nothing out of the ordinary. Yet Peter does offer something extraordinary. This man draws Peter’s attention. So, Peter and John go up to the beggar and Peter says, “Look at us.”

This is the part we need to pay attention to. The beggar was expecting to get something material. But Peter says, “I have no silver or gold to give you. But what I do have I offer freely in the name of Jesus Christ.” And the lame beggar’s feet and ankles became strong. He was healed and he began to jump for joy! He walked into the temple leaping and praising God.

That type of giving... That type of stewardship... That type of Spirit-filled powerful ministry is what we are looking for in this stewardship month. It’s what we are looking for in the entire next year and the entire life of Faith United Methodist Church. It’s that spirit of stewardship that says, we may not have a lot to offer, but what we do have, we offer freely and wholly and trusting in God to do something powerful through this congregation, this group of Christ followers, this people who are looking to join with other brothers and sisters and minister to our community.

What we do have, we offer freely. That is the gift God is looking for. That is the gift God entrusts us with. What talents do we have? What time do we have? What skills do we have? What willingness do we have as a people of God, as a people of faith?

One of the ways we are doing this type of stewardship is by inviting River of Life Lutheran Church to join us in this space. We are inviting them in, in a ministry partnership. And I'll tell you this. There are so many people I talked to yesterday who said, "We love the first time when we met and you said the word "partner." That's what we've been looking for. A partner."

They are hopeful. We are hopeful. All of us together are hopeful for what can be done through the offering we can give. We don't have much. But we have space, and we can share it. We don't have much. But we have passion, and we can let it overflow. We don't have much. But we have vision, and we trust God will take us places with it.

And now, we have partnership. We have brother and sisterhood in Christ. We have teamwork. We have all that God gives us as fruits of the Spirit. In good, faithful stewardship; a stewardship of hope and love, we have the power by the grace of God, to work in ways that were not possible by just us alone. That is a gift from God. It is also what God asks of us. Do justice, love mercy, love each other, and together, walk humbly with your God.

Let us go forward from this place. Let us go willingly with eyes wide open into a partnership which brings hope and change and transformation. Let us be the people of God, joining with the people of God, to share Christ's love with the world.

And all God's people said... Amen!