

October 29, 2023
Stewardship Sunday Sermon
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*"Now, O Lord, take my lips and speak through them;
Take our minds and think through them;
Take our hearts and set them on fire with love for Yourself, Lord Jesus. Amen."*

Good Morning. The topic today - Stewardship.

As I was thinking about giving this talk, two things popped into my head. The first is from the Rite One Holy Eucharist. More on that in a second. I also thought I might do well to check to see what the Gospel reading was for today and see if I could weave part of that message into this sermon. Guess what - those two were the same!.

I did not hear the words in my memory exactly as we heard them this morning. The script that played in my head was this:

"Hear what our Lord Jesus Christ saith:
Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind.
This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it: Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets."

I will argue that there may be something else in addition that hangs on these commandments and that isStewardship. For that is all we do with all we have.

More on this in a bit.

The second thing that popped into my head was a challenge of how I might explain this concept in a way that would allow you to be receptive to this message and in a concise manner. Then it dawned on me. Ask an AI bot to explain stewardship. This takes less than 3 minutes to read.

"Today I want to speak to you about Christian stewardship, a topic that lies at the very heart of our faith. As disciples of Jesus, we are called to be faithful stewards of all that God has entrusted to us – the gifts, talents, time, and resources that have been bestowed upon us.

Stewardship. It's not simply about financial giving, although that is an important aspect. It encompasses every aspect of our lives. It is about recognizing that everything we have comes from God, and it is our responsibility to use these blessings wisely, and for the glory of his kingdom.

In the gospel of Matthew, Jesus tells a parable about a master who trusts his servants with different talents. When the master returns, he commends the servant who has multiplied his talents and says, "Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful with a few things: I will put you in charge of many things" (Matthew chapter 25: verse 23).

This parable teaches us. That stewardship is not about comparing ourselves to others, or the amount of resources we possess. It is about being faithful with what we have been given,

regardless of its size or value. Whether it is great or small, God calls us to use our gifts for his purposes.

As Episcopalians, we are part of a rich tradition that emphasizes the importance of stewardship. Our liturgy, prayers, and sacraments, remind us of our responsibility to care for God's creation, and to love and serve our neighbors."

I want to interrupt here to recall - Love God with all your heart and soul and mind and your neighbor as yourself.

It continues -

"Christian stewardship also involves a sacrificial dimension. It requires us to give our of ourselves, not just our material possessions. It calls us to be generous with our time, talents, and resources, and to seek opportunities to serve others in need. When we give with a joyful and open heart, we align ourselves with the selfless love of Christ."

And I interrupt - Love thy neighbor as thyself... and it continues -

"Furthermore, stewardship is an ongoing journey of growth. It is not a one-time act, but a way of life. We are called to continually examine our hearts and assess how we are using the gifts entrusted to us. Are we investing in relationships? Are we supporting the work of the church and the ministries that advanced God's kingdom? Are we using our time and talents to make a positive impact in our communities?

Dear friends, let us embrace the call to be faithful stewards of God's blessings. Let us give generously, not out of obligation, but out of gratitude for all that God has done for us. Let us seek opportunities to serve others and to make a difference in the world. Let us remember that as we faithfully steward what has been given to us, we participate in God's transformative work, bringing healing, hope, and love to a broken world.

May the Holy Spirit guide us in our journey of stewardship, and may our lives be a testimony to the abundant grace and love of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen"

Love the Lord thy God with all thy heart. Love thy neighbor as thyself.

We are like a painting and Stewardship is the pallet of paints and colors that make that painting. This is the time in our church year when we are called upon to reassess what our stewardship picture will look like for the next year.

Please remember these key points"

- that everything we have comes from God.

- we are entrusted to use our resources of time, talent, and treasure for God's benefit

- we are called to care for God's creation and love and serve our neighbors.

- we are to be stewards with intention and a sense of the sacrificial

- we are to be stewards who give out of love and gratitude, not obligation

- stewardship is an ongoing journey of growth

Arthur Brooks is a social scientist and professor whose area of study is happiness. You may find books that he has written, or Google search him to find a Ted-Talk or Podcast. One of the many dimensions he describes in attaining a sense of happiness is that of sacrifice. Remember

I noted that an aspect of stewardship is intentional and sacrificial. Professor Brooks cites research that describes two aspects that contribute to a sense of satisfaction: that your sacrifice be made out of love not fear and that it is best when it serves others and not yourself. Consider the opportunities we offer at St. James' through our ministries and fellowship. We feed people and we, in turn, are fed.

Our practice of stewardship may begin in church, but it can also extend beyond these walls and into the community. Think of the relief of suffering that we provide through our holiday and summer food programs, the Gift of Warmth coat program North Porch, and Tree of Giving.

This week you will receive a stewardship packet in the mail. A key component of this packet is the pledge card. Yes, money is involved. One side of the card provides an opportunity to make a financial pledge of your treasure (money) for the General Fund (supporting our mission and ministry) and the other for the Building Fund (supporting payment of the mortgage and capital improvements). There will also be materials that will explain proportionate pledging and how to determine a percentage for pledging. Please consider increasing the amount you have pledged this year.

The other side of the card provides an opportunity to pledge your time and talent. You may have noticed that I did not really mention money until just a bit ago. What I've primarily focused on is your pledge of your talents. Please complete this side of the card as well. Professor Brooks notes that to be most effectively developed as a habit, your pledge can be developed incrementally. Try a small bit of commitment and see what develops.

We would certainly be a sad church if people only pledged money and no one participated in any ministries. Well, there would be no ministries or coffee hours or anything. That would be terrible. We are a community of people who aspire to support each other.

Remember what the Bot asked:

- Are we investing in relationships?
- Are we supporting the work of the church and the ministries that advanced God's kingdom?
- Are we using our time and talents to make a positive impact in our communities?

I believe that Stewardship is exactly the plan for how we demonstrate our love of God and our neighbors.

Amen.