

StewardCAST

A monthly e-newsletter of LCMS Stewardship Ministry

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The Good Samaritan: A Lesson in Stewardship



The Parable of the Good Samaritan is one that tends to be pretty easy to wrap our heads around. In this passage from Luke 10, we meet a lawyer who is seeking to trap Jesus and justify himself. The initial discourse between the lawyer and Jesus points to the definition of the Law: love God and serve the neighbor. But when pushed farther, it is obvious that there is an emptiness in this for the lawyer. Seeking to justify himself, he asks, “Who is my neighbor?” In the familiar words of the parable, Jesus also sheds some light on the definition of a steward.

Teaching about stewardship is challenging for most parish pastors and steward leaders. The response to this challenge usually fits into one of three categories. The first group engages stewardship teaching in connection with the budget process. In this case, it becomes the cost of doing business. The second just lets stewardship happen. There is no plan, no purpose. Whatever comes, comes. The third group is intentional about stewardship. There is regular conversation about stewardship that gives way to regular action.

Examining the approaches

Two of these three approaches are not faithful. Congregations and steward leaders who allow stewardship to simply be a discussion of budgets and balance sheets are guilty of severing stewardship from its theological moorings. Stewardship is intimately connected to creation and redemption, the altar, pulpit and baptismal font. There is nothing in this that is simply the cost of doing business. Being a steward is a trust from God. The steward was created for this. Christ died on the cross to redeem failed stewards and restore them to the task of stewardship. To reduce stewardship to this is like the priest in the parable who is so concerned about the task at hand that the full purpose is lost.

The second group is like the Levite. They just go about their business. There is no concern or compassion. There is a focus only on self. There is an intentional choice to turn a blind eye to the need of the neighbor directly in front of them. In a congregation, this can take the shape of complacency. In situations like this, it will be enough to preserve the institution, its culture and its practices. But this kind of stewardship is blind to those living in the shadow of the steeple who are beaten, naked and left for dead by a world that is broken by sin, happened upon by the devil, and aided and abetted by the sinful flesh. This is not faithful stewardship either.

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An example to imitate

It is the Good Samaritan who teaches the stewardship lesson in this parable. The Samaritan shows that he is not concerned with who he is, his own safety or even where he is going. He recognizes the need in his neighbor and jumps into action. Without concern for his own safety, he stops, cares and endures great expense, not for himself but for someone who would have likely not seen him in the same way. He re-routes his trip, lays out two days' wages and makes a promise to make good on the rest of what is needed. There is nothing about self in the Samaritan. This is what leads to the real stewardship lesson in the parable: There is no room for self in stewardship!

There can be no room for self in faithful stewardship. Those are powerful but true words. This is true because there is no room for self in the Gospel. Jesus was at no point concerned only for Himself, His comfort, His fame. He came to seek and to save that which was lost. When that treasure was found, He paid the entire price in the currency of His holy, precious blood and His innocent suffering and death. He did this for enemies, not friends! He put Himself in peril of the cross and death to give life to those who were only focused on themselves.

“There is nothing about self in the Samaritan. This is what leads to the real stewardship lesson in the parable: There is no room for self in stewardship!”

Stewarding the Gospel

This Gospel mercy shown to us freely and extravagantly in Jesus is really the only thing we are called to steward. What we normally associate with stewardship — time, talents and treasures — are really only the means by which we steward the Gospel. It does indeed take financial resources for a congregation to proclaim the life-giving, eternity-changing message of the Gospel. It does take the talents of stewards to carry out the physical nature of stewardship. In the world today, when life has grown far more frenetic than ever, time may well be the greatest trust the steward can use in service of the Gospel and the neighbor. All three of these were on display in the parable. All three of these are characteristics of a faithful steward as well.

The Lord Jesus enjoins the lawyer to “go, and do likewise.” This is exactly the same call to the steward. The Lord sets the steward on the path of life with trusts to be used for the glory of God and service to the neighbor. This is not in any way to earn favor or salvation. This call to “go, and do likewise” stewardship isn’t about the steward at all. It is about the steward having open eyes, open hands and an open heart to reflect the compassion Jesus illustrates in the Parable of the Good Samaritan. In a real, tangible way, the Good Samaritan is actually the Good Steward. Jesus did this for the steward. The steward freely and joyously reflects that to others.

Stewardship isn’t about the individual steward or the individual congregation. It is about Jesus! In this Gospel joy, “go, and do likewise.”

