

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ!

I suppose most Lutherans, when they hear the word “stewardship” see dollar signs and think the pastor (or whoever) is about to talk about money. What do you think of though, when you hear the word “steward”? If I ask all stewards who are here this morning to stand, will you stand? There is a lot of misunderstanding about the word stewardship, and I’m really not going to talk about that this morning. A lot of folks though hear the word “steward” and really aren’t sure just what it means. So this morning, we’ll talk about stewards, because maybe that will help inform your view of stewardship.

A steward isn’t an owner, instead a steward is a caretaker, a manager if you will, a manager or servant who takes care of an owner’s property, serving in the capacity of steward. It’s a relationship of trust because a steward acts on behalf of the owner. Now a steward is not an owner, nor is an owner a steward.

You and I bear Christ’s name, Christian, and in our gospel this morning there is a strong differentiation between lording it over someone or something, and serving as stewards. For those of us who bear Christ’s name, it’s a life-giving, life-changing difference. Jesus has been telling disciples again, for the third time, that he will be handed over to the chief priests and scribes, condemned, mocked and spat upon, flogged and put to death, that on the third day he will rise again. The disciples don’t get it, it’s not yet time for them to understand the meaning of what Jesus has told them. They think in terms of glory, a messianic kingdom, like earthly rulers, a court, throne, all the rest. John and James want places of glory and prestige in this kingdom. Like the jockeying that is taking place in this time leading up to the election next year.

James and John aren’t thinking in terms of what Jesus is going to suffer and endure, they don’t think in terms of death, or his rising again. “You do not know what you are asking”, Jesus tells them. Those places of honor are not for Jesus to grant, and Jesus tells them they will drink the cup that he drinks and they will be baptized with the baptism with which Jesus will be baptized. The cup and the baptism Jesus tells them will be theirs is suffering and martyrdom for the name they will bear – Christian. For you and I to be baptized into Christ, to bear his cross on our foreheads, to live as his people with his name, is to die to self, to be different, distinctively different, to make a real difference in the world. To bear his cross, his name is to live our lives as his stewards, not as owners or rulers, but as servants, stewards of all he has given us. To bear his cross, his name is to make a difference, to see that all we do, all we have whether money, time, ourselves, is to act as stewards of Christ.

This then is the essence of Christian discipleship, to walk with Christ, to learn from Christ, to give of ourselves, to care for Christ’s people, his creation, to emulate, imitate Jesus for he came not to be served but to serve, to give his life as a ransom for many. You know, we get caught up in the money aspect of all this and that

insulates us from what Jesus wants and expects each of us to do. The gift of self comes before time, talent, treasure, those things are tangible ways to give what no one else can give. Soon we will have our offering, offering in a consciously chosen action. What we offer is a response to what we have received from God. Money represents the gifts of time and talent invested to earn money. Offering takes a conscious action, representing the gift of ourselves, which God receives and transforms. Think of how God takes the gifts of bread and wine, the body and blood of Christ, and gives them back to us as a means of grace, Christ's presence entering into our lives. As we give ourselves to God, he gives us stewardship, calling upon us to serve as stewards, to make a difference.

Our Lord has given us what is his alone to give, our place in the Kingdom. It's a gift and we are called to respond with joy, with thanksgiving, to serve as stewards, to follow our Lord's example, to make a difference, a real difference in the world.

AMEN