

Pastor Joe Polzin  
Romans 3:21-31  
“Transformed by Faith”  
Year A – Stewards Transformed: Week Two  
July 16, 2017

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.  
Today is our second week in our stewardship series, Stewards Transformed by Grace, Faith, and Love.

Last Sunday, we examined what stewardship is, that it is a transformed response to God’s grace. And like Zacchaeus, who had a face-to-face encounter with Jesus, a face-to-face encounter with God’s grace, transforming everything he did from that point on, so God’s grace transforms our whole lives. If you weren’t able to join us last week, I encourage that you go on our website to see the sermon recording, or read a copy of it in the latest Word for Wednesday email.

Suffice it to say, what we found last week is that we steward, or manage, that which God owns and has graciously entrusted to us. Stewardship begins with the fact that God has gifted His own Son for our salvation, and we respond by using wisely all the blessings that God provides for our earthly life. We respond to God’s rich grace by serving Him, and serving our neighbors in our own “acts of grace” that He has prepared for us to do.

That’s *what* stewardship is. Today, we take a slightly different approach, and consider *why* we are good stewards, why God has made us His stewards at all. A pastor shared with me recently a one-line definition of stewardship that gets at the *why* of stewardship: “It’s not that God needs our help to do anything, but through Christ, He gives us the privilege of working alongside Him.”

And it’s true. God doesn’t encourage us to be good stewards because, if we weren’t, His purposes in this world would be foiled. We don’t support the mission and ministry of [Trinity/Mt. Hope] because, without our church in this community, the kingdom of God here in [Gaylord/Grayling] would cease to exist.

No, God’s work of His kingdom, namely, bringing people to faith in Jesus Christ, and the regeneration of hearts through faith by the power of the Holy Spirit, does not depend on you or your stewardship. Nor does it depend on [Trinity/Mt. Hope] and our stewardship of God’s gifts as a church. If we went away, God would still be at work.

And at this point, I’ve made all our officers and council members very nervous. “What are you doing, Pastor?” But it’s true, God doesn’t *need* our help. But He has *invited* our help, otherwise He wouldn’t have put us where we are today. He *could* use others to share the Gospel, and He *could* use others to reach out to our neighbors with the gifts He’s given them. But He’s invited *us*, to join Him in His plan for this area of Michigan, and given us the faith necessary to live as Christian stewards of all the things He’s given to us. Living as a steward is a *response to* and an *expression of our faith*. The faith that has transformed us.

That’s our focus today, stewards transformed by faith. Look with me for a moment at our Epistle reading, Romans chapter 3, starting with verse 23. Paul writes, “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God...” In other words, there is not one person who, without God, isn’t in temporal and eternal danger because of their sin, their straying and rebellion against God.

Verse 24, “And are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood.” Christ came to offer himself

as a sacrifice so that we would no longer be in the danger our sin had put us in. Instead, Christ took our place, took on what we deserved, and by his blood that was shed for us, we are saved.

Middle of verse 25, “To be received by faith.” We receive the amazing benefits that Christ won for us *by the faith* God has given us to believe in him. We trust this was what Christ did for us, because of our faith.

And look at verse 26, “It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just...” In other words, if God forgave our sin without a payment for the debt we incurred, God would no longer be just. But *we* couldn’t pay it. Instead, Jesus did, so that we would be graciously freed from our sin. And so, God’s *is* just, and also “the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.”

You don’t receive all that Jesus has done for you by proving your worth. You don’t even have faith because you have produced it by your works. Faith itself is a gift from God, a regeneration of our hearts completed in our Baptisms. We don’t live faithfully as Christian stewards in order to have faith. We have been given our faith, which enables us to live faithfully as Christian stewards.

And what *does* living faithfully as a Christian steward look like? Jesus was in one of the outer courts of the temple, when he found place to sit down. And the spot he chose was immediately across from a collection spot for people’s offerings. If we were to guess who the good stewards were, we would be tempted to choose one of the many rich people, who came to put in great sums of money. Their offerings would have looked and sounded quite impressive, as all that money tumbled in.

But it was a poor widow, a person who was otherwise invisible to society, who caught the eye of Jesus. And he called his disciples over to him as she put two copper coins in the treasury, literally the smallest denomination of coin possible. But Jesus said, “Truly, I say to you, this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing... For they all contributed out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, all she had to live on” (Mark 12:43-44).

Jesus was telling them, *this* is what it means to live faithfully as a steward. It’s not only faith to believe that God has made all things, and has entrusted us to manage them well, which includes what we offer back to Him. It’s also faith to trust that God is going to care for our every moment of every day, so that we *can* give of ourselves freely and sacrificially.

But we only offer ourselves sacrificially to God and to others because God first sacrificed everything for us. Which is why it’s important to note when this scene in the temple took place. We noticed this last week, that Zacchaeus encountering Jesus was a little more than a week before Jesus’ crucifixion. This moment in the temple was only days before, very much in the looming shadow of the cross. So, why is this significant?

The hymn we just sang moments ago put it this way: “When Jesus saw her costly gift/  
And knew she had no more,/ He praised a love that spared not self/  
And called her rich, though poor.

“At last He brought His offering/ And laid it on a tree;/ There gave Himself, His life, His love/  
For all humanity” (LSB 787 *The Temple Rang with Golden Coins* sts. 2-3).

The widow’s gift of self-sacrifice, the widow’s stewardship, was founded in her faith. Her faith in her God that He would provide for her everything she could possibly need. And in a couple days, she would see the most amazing evidence of that fact, as her Savior gave his all for her. And Jesus saw her faith, which is what he pointed out to the disciples. That whether our gift is small or large, it’s our heart with which we give, our faith, that matters.

God doesn't need our offerings. He didn't need the widow's mite. But He does want us. So He has given us faith, which receives the gift of His Son's offering on the cross. He has invited us into a faithful, trusting relationship with Him. He has invited us to be good stewards, responding to that sacrificial gift of Jesus, believing in him by the gift of faith. Our individual stewardship, then, becomes an expression of that transforming faith we've been given.

That's also what we're doing as a church here at [Trinity/Mt. Hope]. God has put our congregation here for a reason, and He's given us faith to believe in Him and all He's done for us over the years. And He's given us faith to trust in Him to lead us where He would have us go in the future. So, we respond, each of individually, and as a church collectively, in faith. God invites us to work alongside Him in furthering His kingdom here in [Gaylord/Grayling], and we have so many rich opportunities laying before us, but it will take everyone here. There is not one person here today who is not vitally important to the work God's given for us to do.

When we realize all that we have, including our faith, has been given to us as a gift, we can joyfully live and give as stewards. We've been given all that we could possibly need. We joyfully give back, even to the point where it becomes sacrificial giving, because of the trust we have in our God. Whether it's money, time, or our unique abilities, these can all be given as expressions of our faith. And it's our chance to participate in God's plan for our lives, our church, and our community. What greater privilege could we possibly be given? In Jesus' name. Amen.

And now may the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.