

Stewardship/Thanksgiving Sunday – 11/19/2023

In some churches when I say that we have come to end of our stewardship campaign, people often breathe a sigh of relief. The thought may be that we don't have to hear money talk again for another year. If you have noticed here at Faith, the past two Sundays have not been about money. It has been about how Faith has embraced people and how we use the resources that we have been given to take care of and are shared with our neighbors.

Over the years, stewardship has gotten a bad rap. It is all how we define stewardship. I have said once or twice that the word comes from the old English and means keeper of the pig sty. To be a steward means that we take care of what has been entrusted to us.

What has been entrusted to us is time, talent and treasure. This really does include our relationships, with ourselves and others. So, stewardship is about how we take care of all of these things and people. The bottom line is that we as Christians believe that we do not own anything, God owns everything.

This way of thinking does not fly too well in our society. We all work hard to get what we have. As Christians, we are called to think about we and not I. We were created to live in community. This is what God in Jesus Christ has been trying to teach us how to do since God put human beings on this earth.

Somehow when we can focus on what we are thankful for, it is easier to have the we way of thinking. Thus, it is more than appropriate to celebrate Stewardship/Thanksgiving Sunday together. Stewardship is about living our lives in thankfulness.

I would like us to think about how often we have talked about giving back what we own, where in reality, we don't own anything. I would like us rather to think about, how we use what we have been given to manage. Nothing is permanent, in reality everything is temporary. We are challenged to use our time, talent and treasure to the best of our ability to glorify God in thanksgiving and in consultation with God in Jesus Christ.

Worshipping here together is one way in which to express our thankfulness. When we gather in thankfulness it can refocus our way of thinking in order to navigate the week ahead. It can put our hearts in a place to think of we and not I.

Psalm 100 offers some suggestions on how we can worship together. I believe when we gather that there is a combination of individual and corporate worship. When we all focus our hearts and minds on thankfulness to God, there

creates a connection that brings us to a place of peace and openness to experience Jesus together.

Psalms 100 was used as a processional by the Hebrew people into the temple. I would like to read you a different paraphrased version.

¹⁻² On your feet now—applaud GOD! Bring a gift of laughter,
sing yourselves into God's presence.

³ Know this: GOD is God. God made us, and we belong to the creator.

We are God's people and God's well-tended sheep.

⁴ Enter with the password: "Thank you!" Make yourselves at home, talking praise.

Give thanks to God. Bless God's name.

⁵ For GOD is sheer beauty, all-generous in love, loyal always and ever.

I've asked in a few groups that I read this in, what would happen if I asked the congregation to applaud God and they looked at me like I was crazy. We applaud human beings, but what about God. Our applause normally comes when we are overwhelmed by a performance or a talk or sometimes just showing our thankfulness.

Worship can be a place where we let it all hang out, but we usually don't. Some of you have clapped on some songs with the beat. We applaud at the end of the postlude and sometimes after other musical pieces. Why not for God?

Then there is laughter. So, what about bringing a gift of laughter? What does laughter do, but to relax us and open us up and allow us to be freer. Laughter is a release. It is acceptable to laugh in a worship service. Most likely God laughs at some of the things that we do.

The Psalm goes on, Know this: GOD is God. God made us, and we belong to the creator. We are God's people and God's well-tended sheep. God knows us as God has created us. God desires us to be in relationship. This knowing is an intimate knowing. Have you ever been overwhelmed by God that you were brought to tears, that you wanted to raise your hand, wanted to express your thankfulness in some way, but then felt what would people say?

When we intimately love someone with our whole heart, we often do things out of our character. I often think of parents doing things with their kids that they would not normally do. There may be something that we do for our partners in life that is out of our character. Why not for God?

One of the reasons that we gather to worship is to say thank you to God with our time, talent and treasure. God invites us to worship, to be at home, talking praise, giving thanks and blessing God's name. Thus, the password, thank you, can flow out of our hearts. It is not a password that is easily forgotten.

I would challenge us to express our thanks, maybe in ways that we have not tried and may feel a little uncomfortable. Maybe a better way to say it is that I give

you permission, or better yet that God gives you permission. I've never turned down an amen either.

We can be healthy stewards in showing our thankfulness through our time, talent, and treasure in worship as well as in every area of our lives. When we come with an attitude and realization that everything including ourselves and relationships are given to us to care for, our approach to life is different. We are better able to think more about we than I. The good news is that even though we will always struggle with this, God's love never leaves us.

When we bring our pledge cards up today or return them at some time, remember that it is really a commitment of how we are going to use one part of what God has entrusted us with, to take care of. This commitment is between you and God.

The time and talent sheet will be coming out soon. In the closing prayer of the sermon, I am going to ask God for us how to use what God has entrusted to us. God can tell us how to use our time, talent and treasure that will help us to think more about we than I. It will also be then what is best for the community.

Stewardship is about thanking God for what God has entrusted to us to take care of for God. It is how we are called to live our lives as Christians.

Let us pray. Gracious God, you have given us everything that we need to live our lives for you. We have often forgotten that we are stewards and not owners. Today we ask you how you want us to use what you have given to us to take care of, our time, talent and treasure. You have blessed us as individuals in so many ways as well as us as Faith Lutheran Church. May your Holy Spirit speak to us now and every day as how to use what you have entrusted to us to take care of. In Jesus name, Amen.