

Pentecost 19, 2009
Good Hope Lutheran Church

This is the annual stewardship sermon, so you know.

Maybe we better begin with prayer.

Heavenly Father, you give us all those good things we call our own, and we thank you. On this day we pray for only one more gift—grateful hearts. Lord give us grateful hearts, free us from fear and fill us faith. Take us and shape us and make us your own, in the name of Jesus Christ we pray, AMEN.

Here in the church, the word stewardship often seems to be a polite, stain glass synonym for money—as if what we really want to talk about here is filling the plate each week, but we're too embarrassed to come right out and say so. Wrong. Wrong on both counts, actually. Stewardship is money, stewardship is being generous with your offerings and I'm not embarrassed to say that, first of all. And second, stewardship is money but more than money—stewardship is all of life, lived in response to the God who died and rose again to save you. Again, stewardship is all life, lived for Him, now if it was only money, it'd actually be easier, right? If it was only money you could write the Lord a check for 50 bucks and say “Hey, take it and please pay no attention to how I acted at the game last Friday night, nothing personal.” Doesn't work that way. God isn't after your money, God is after you. The Lord doesn't want your wallet, He wants your life, now your wallet

is part of the package. You are called to financial obedience as surely as you are called to honesty in speech and fidelity in marriage and integrity in the workplace and so on, money is part of the package. But only a part.

So here's the plan today. Stewardship is all life lived in response to the God who died and rose again for you but for now I can only focus on three points: Time, money; the heart. Time, money; the heart—we start with time.

I don't care if you've been a Christian 8 minutes or 80 years. It does not matter if you are new to this congregation, or if your ancestors came over on the Famous Dove. Age, wealth, family status, doesn't matter, fact is, everyone here has 7 days a week, 24 hours a day. Seven days a week, 24 hours a day, now how do you use your time? What after all is actually important to you? I've told you this before, I started shaving when I was 15 years old. Didn't need to really, sort of felt left out, I started shaving when I was 15. Shaving takes me 5 minutes a day. Five minutes a day, that's about a half an hour a week, 26 hours more than one full day a year—shaving! If I live to be 75, that's two months of my life, shaving! Good use of time? Well, I've seen myself with a beard, I kind of look like a peach with an attitude problem, so for me, yes, it's a good and proper use of time. Children, two to three hours a day, watching TV? Add it up. That's like 7 years, in front of the tube. Anybody on their deathbed ever said "Oh, if only I had time for

one more episode of CSI Miami”? I don’t think so.

Time is not just a part of life, time is life. And your time, your life, really does not belong to you, does it? Does it? No, it belongs to the God who made you, it belongs to the God who died and rose again to save you, Jesus Christ is His name! Your time, your life, it’s His now, right?

So how would God have you spend your time, time that really is His after all, well the Bible has a few pointers. I’ll simply list them:

One, worship. Remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy. A commandment, after all.

Two, Bible study. 2 Timothy 3, “All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching the truth, rebuking error, correcting faults, and giving instruction in right living,” how are we ever going to find the destination, if we never look at the map? Why are we surprised when our young people lose their way, if we’ve never insisted on showing them?

So one worship, two Bible study, and three service. Helping others. Getting outside of ourselves and overcoming our reluctance, overcoming our embarrassment; overcoming our merely good intentions to do what ought to be done for neighbors, and for a world in need; as it is written in Galatians 6 verse 9, “let us not grow weary in doing what is right. For if we do not give up,” it says, “the day will come when we reap the harvest.”

And so on, I could go on for a while, I'm afraid I don't have—the time. But we do have time, all of us, for whatever we think is important; and nothing says more about us than how we use our time. We belong to Jesus now, so worship, Bible study, acts of service and love each day—that's how we as the people of God, are called to spend the time of our lives.

But more than time, stewardship is also money? It is, now listen. If you are new to Christ. If you are new to this congregation. Then you have my permission to pass on the money part. God wants you, not just your wallet; this church wants you, and not just your wallet. We at Good Hope are current on all our financial obligations, so anyone brand new today need not feel burdened by the electric bill, ok? But I say this a smile. I'm grinning, because I believe if you give God the chance, He will move you in your life of faith, to the point where you want to give. Those new to faith—worship, study, give God a chance, let Him deal with your life and show you the way—trust me, sooner or later your wallet will come along for the ride. Veteran members however. Those who know Good Hope is your church home. If after all these years you are not to the point that you sense God's call extending to your financial life, when are you going to get there? If by now you are not excited about sharing the Good News of God with children and grandchildren and community—what's it going to take? If by now you

are not burdened by the poor and the hungry of this county and this world—when will you be? The call of God extends to your check book too, and you know that. You know that. And, the question is not, Does the church need money?—I'm not asking you to give because of some sort of budget crunch. The question is, Do you want to grow spiritually? Do you want to mature in faith? Do you sense an opportunity from God, for yourself and for the world? Then you need to learn generosity, you need to learn to rely on the Lord—and that means learning to give, and give freely.

So stewardship is time, it is money, it is all life given over to the Lord. And it is the heart. The heart, the rich young man in today's Gospel, he had all the commandments right, and he was probably even a little generous too. Where was his heart? Well, not with God, as it turns out. For all of us, there's something—for this young man obviously it was money, but for all of us there's something—some grief some habit some thing blocking our hearts and keeping us from the Lord. Stewardship—faith—is giving that to Him too, and trusting Him to deal with it. The one who overcame sin and death and the grave, can overcome your guilt and your remorse. He can deal with your sin, or your simple awkward self-consciousness: Whatever obstacle in your life, it's not bigger than the tombstone He moved away on Easter! Put yourself in His hands, starting with the heart—things like time

and money don't seem so challenging, when once the heart belongs to Him.

As I pray it will this day for all of us, in Jesus' name, AMEN.

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