

FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

East Moline, Illinois

Pastor Becky Sherwood

October 28, 2018, The 23rd Sunday After Pentecost/The 30th Sunday of Ordinary Time

Joshua 24:14-18, II Corinthians 9:6-15

**SERMON SERIES: STEWARDS FOR CHRIST
CONSECRATION SUNDAY—THE STEWARDSHIP OF LIFE**

Right now, in this very minute, with all that your lives hold,
you have exactly as much of everything you need
to lead a good, wonderful, faithful life
as a steward and gift-giver to God.

No matter if you are in grade-school, in your 9th decade of life or somewhere in-between we are all completely prepared as stewards and caretakers of God's gifts.

God has given us everything we will ever need to live our lives!
We have been given the gifts of life, salvation, faith and belief,
As we've talked about the last three weeks:
We have been entrusted with care of our incredibly beautiful, complex planet and all the living things it contains,
God has given to each of us the people we love, our families, our friends, our spouses and partners,
God helps us see that we are part of an expansive, diverse planet of God's people;
we are citizens of the world, who live in a specific place and time,
and we each have abilities and talents that we use at church, in our families, at our jobs, at our play, in school.

And on this Consecration Sunday I want to say to you: Congratulations!, you've made it through three weeks of stewardship sermons and now only one to go!

As I have said to you over the past month, the whole idea of stewardship is that the way we live our lives becomes our thank you to God for all that we have been given by God.
Stewardship is about giving back to God in the midst of our day to day living.
It's not about one Sunday a year when you brace yourselves to listen to the minister talk about finances.
True stewardship has nothing to do with finances, budgets and the bottom line.
True stewardship is about giving from all that our lives hold!
God has made us care givers and stewards, of so many things.

In the last three weeks I have asked you to look for ways you can be gift-givers to God. This is a response of thanksgiving to our God for the things we've discussed in the last weeks.
We are invited to be good stewards of our faith, our gifts and talents, the creation around us, and our world citizenship.

As I said our very first week, stewardship is not about our financial statements, our annual budget, our proposed 2019 budget, or the bottom line of where we are at the end of each month.

Because of this, you may be thinking you're going to get through these four weeks without me ever talking about money. But it probably won't surprise you that I believe that stewardship is also

about how we care for our finances, how we support the life of this specific congregation, and how we reach out with our financial gifts, as well as our gifts of prayer and action.

Like the Israelites that Joshua spoke to in the last chapter of Joshua, this is a day for choosing whom we will serve. How will each of us individually, and all of us as a church family, live out the life of stewardship?

As we make decisions for the coming year about whom we will serve and how we will live, I want to tell you what I have observed about us as a group of stewards. Because if we look around us we are surrounded by stewards.

I believe that I am looking at a sanctuary full of stewards and gift-givers, again no matter your age, you are already giving good gifts back to God.

I watch you be stewards of the gift of faith when I watch you attend church Sunday mornings to worship God.

You are stewards of your time when you come to Bible Studies before church, and God's Kidz Sunday School, and Youth Sunday School, and Presbyterian Woman Bible studies during the week.

I watch you be good stewards of faith as you teach our children and youth in Sunday School and youth group. This church does a good and creative job of passing on the stories of faith to our children.

And just a commercial message: They are always looking for more stewards to join them as assistants who don't prepare the lesson, but assist with the many young children who are in Sunday School right now. If you are interested, please talk to Denise Maxwell or Barb Newburg

I watch our children and youth as stewards who come hear, to learn, enjoy friends and sing together.

You are also stewards of your faith when you share from your lives in adult Sunday School.

You are stewards of faith and time when you take time to pray at 10:45 A.M. with the church each day,

I hear about your stewardship as you pray for each other and pray for me and the ministries we share.

I have watched you as stewards of the talents and gifts you've been given. You share your talents with all of us when you ring bells, sing in the choir, and in the past and hopefully to return soon, when you do wonderful puppet presentations and sing with the youth choir.

I hear about the ways you care for each other with food, cards, calls and prayers. This church is known as a friendly and caring church. You give back to God every time you invite someone in, help them feel welcome to church, and invite them back to join us again.

You are stewards of time and love when you reach out to someone who is hurting, sit beside someone who is sitting alone on a Sunday morning, invite a new person to join your lunch group after church, set up a time for your children to play together, invite a friend to youth group, or invite a friend to worship.

You are stewards of your finances as you put your dollar bills and coins and checks into envelopes and into the offering plates week by week.

You are gift-givers of money when sometime in grade school or middle school, you stop taking money from your parents to put in the offering plate, and decide you want to give from your own money to help with the work of God.

You are stewards as you come to Consecration Sunday as decide on your own, or decide with a spouse or partner or family members, how you are going to support the church in the coming year.

I watch your stewardship of your gifts and talents, in all the quiet ministries that go on around this building, as cups and napkins appear in cupboards, floors get waxed, bulletins and newsletters get folded, and as repairs are creatively made around the building, and as you pitch in to help on Sundays after worship when there is a project or event or a mission project for us to do together.

I watch your stewardship of time and talents as you sit on commissions, as you make decisions for our church as elders, and as you visit and care for our homebound members as deacons and, as you take your turn at being a greeter or a coffee server or usher.

I see your stewardship in the world as you gather pop tabs for Ronald McDonald House, soup labels for schools, bottle caps for Buddy Benches and old glasses so they can give someone else sight.

I see stewardship in action as you fill the grocery card for the Food Pantry, as you bring gifts for quarterly collections, as you drop off shampoo and soaps for Winnie's Place.

You are stewards of your time when you head to the meal site to prepare and serve a meal to those who are hungry. Or children and youth, as you gather as a Sunday School class to prepare food and take it to the Mealsite.

You are stewards as you gather supplies for Birthday kits with the Youth Group, and as you volunteer your time and give food to the Watertown Food Bank.

I hear of your stewardship in faith when you tell me that you have been praying for someone in the church, or a concern in our world, or praying for God's guidance as you make a life decision, or when you tell me that you pray for me as your pastor (something I always need and rely on!)

I see your stewardship in the ways you care for the life of this church. You have a long history of helping this church grow and flourish through the years. November 11th will be our 97th year as a Presbyterian Congregation, and each of you is part of that history.

You have a long history of providing for the life, ministries and mission work of this church, and you are stewards of the future we are creating together.

My hope and prayer is that each one of us will see ourselves as stewards who have been given absolutely everything we will ever need to live faithful lives that give thanks to God.

Now the thing about stewardship is that you are never done being a steward. Like the people who surrounded Joshua those hundreds and hundreds of years ago, we are called over and over again to choose who we will serve with our lives.

Stewardship is in the present tense, it is active and alive and continues to seek ways to make a difference in the world, in this church, and in the life of faith, whether you are very young, or very old, or somewhere in-between.

As we heard this morning in II Corinthians, this is the day to choose what we will give, and how we will give and in what ways we will give to the life of this church. On this Consecration Sunday we are invited to pledge again how we will

give financially, faithfully, creatively and with talent,
and how we will live with love that changes lives and hearts,
love that acts on behalf of others,
and love that holds a vision of a good future lived together as God's people.

The author of II Corinthians reminds us that God loves a cheerful giver.

Let us pledge this Sunday to be God's cheerful givers and stewards in every area of our lives. Because we have been given exactly enough to be abundant givers to our God, from every part of our lives.

Let us give from our God-given gifts and talents as people who are
held in love,
challenged in faith,
shown God's pathways,
guided in our steps,
called on to serve God and others
and invited to give cheerfully and joyfully!

We have been given enough!
So let us give enough....and live!