

## FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

East Moline, Illinois

Pastor Becky Sherwood

**October 20, 2019, The 19<sup>th</sup> Sunday After Pentecost/The 29<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time**

II Timothy 3:14-4:5, Psalm 65

### THANKFUL STEWARDS

This past week I contacted Sheila Sheer, who often preaches when I'm away, and asked her if she had any good stewardship stories. I explained to her that the Grace Notes were going to leading worship next week on our Consecration Sunday, and there was no way I was going to let a year go by without a "Stewardship Sermon." So here we are a week before we bring our faith pledges for 2020 and you don't need to worry that you are going to miss out on a Stewardship Sermon.

I'd like to begin with one of my favorites of the stories Sheila sent. It comes from a pastor in the tiny town of Wyaconda, Missouri. The Rev. Stacey Nicholas served the Wyaconda Christian Church when she wrote this story:

I serve a very small church. When I first came here, we had only one child, Logan. Logan is now 3 and is one of the best-behaved children I know.

Last Sunday, Logan fell asleep during the sermon (not my fault, really) and did not wake up until the doxology--thus, missing communion and the (offering) collection. While I was still at the (Communion) table and just as the 14-year-old usher put the (offering) gifts on the table, Logan started to throw a tantrum. I mean a screaming, throwing himself down on the floor, uncontrolled fit. He kept yelling, "it's not fair," ("it's not fair.") His poor mother wanted to throttle him, I'm sure.

Remember, this is a small church (with) 25 in worship this Sunday, so I can take some latitude. From the (Communion) table, I said, "Logan what is not fair."

He sat up and said, "I didn't get my turn."

I said, "Your turn at what?"

Reaching into his pocket, Logan brought out a handful of pennies. "I didn't get my turn," he said with a bit of a pout.

Without prompting, the (teenage) usher, walked back up the aisle, bent down, and Logan dropped his pennies in the collection plate. "Thank you," the little one said quietly.

Worship continued as usual, but the message was loudly heard.

Stacey Nicholas, Wyaconda Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), Missouri, USA

On this Sunday before our Consecration Sunday, when we will bring our financial pledges for the coming year to worship with us, I want to talk with you about "getting your turn" in the life of faith.

I want to talk with you about "getting your turn" at being a steward.

Stewards are people who care for something that has been put in their care. The steward of a ship or train or plane takes care of the passengers. A financial steward cares for other people's finances.

A Christian steward takes care of all that God has put into our lives. We are stewards and caretakers when we care for our time, our money, our love for others and ourselves, our talents and abilities, as a way to faithfully show God our love.

Stewardship isn't just about spending money; it's about how we are spending all of our lives!

Stewardship is about giving back to God in the midst of our day to day living, using all that God has given to us.

It's not about one Sunday a year when you brace yourselves to listen to the minister talk about finances.

True stewardship is about giving from all that our lives hold to God and God's people!

We are invited to love God with our giving from our time, our money, our love for others, and our talents and abilities, with the same devotion of three-year-old Logan, who understood better than most adults how important it is to "get our turn" giving to God.

Our Psalm this morning is a wonderful reminder of who our God is, who has entrusted each of us with so much as God's Stewards.

One author says we can divide this Psalm into three parts. When we divide it into three parts, we are reminded that God is our God of the Temple or of Faith, our God of the world, and our God of the created earth.

The Psalm begins by reminding us that there is no one greater than God in our lives.

*Mays, James, Psalms, Interpretation, A Commentary for Preaching and Teaching.*  
Louisville: John Knox Press, 1994, p. 219

If you'd like to follow along as we walk through the Psalm, you'll find it on page 528 of the Old Testament.

First, we follow God who gives us the gift of faith, as we see in verses 1-4. The first people to sing this Psalm believed that God met them in the Temple. What the Psalmist is talking about is our God we meet through faith and worship.

This Psalm says to us, and to those who have sung it for over 3,000 years: Praise is due to God, vows of faith are to be made to God, and all people will come to God to worship.

Because it is only God who answers prayers.

It is only God who forgives us.

The Psalmist says in verse 3 that when our sin overwhelms us, God covers up our guilt and sin, so that they are forgiven, and the actual words mean "they are covered up and robbed of their power."

God gives us the gift of healing what is broken in us, that has broken our relationship with God and with others.

Brueggemann, Walter, *The Message of the Psalms*, Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1984, p. 135, the three phrases of "to you," in first three sentences, mean that no one but God receives these things)

We are caregivers and stewards of the gift of worship we give to our God who hears our prayers and forgives us.

Next the Psalm praises God in verses 5-9 for who God is in the world. The Psalmist says in verse 5: "you are the hope of all the ends of the earth and the farthest seas." What a great description of our God! We are caregivers and stewards for the God who gives us hope, whose power created the whole world, the highest mountains, the loudest seas, and even the psalmist says "the loudest peoples," God has power over them all.

We are caregivers and stewards for our expansive God who cares for all the earth, and cares for us.

Finally, in the last verses, 10-13, we hear of God's care for the earth God has made. Scholars believe that this Psalm may have originally been sung at the time of the harvest, or maybe following a time of drought.

We hear of the abundant gifts God gives to the earth.

The Psalmist says God waters the earth so the grain grows, and even the wagon tracks overflow.

All that grows in the wilderness is abundant. The hills are joyful in all that God grows there, the hillsides are covered with grazing animals, grain grows in the valleys.

The Psalmist ends with a wonderful picture of creation itself singing and shouting together with joy to the Lord.

This Psalm shows us the God for whom we are stewards and caretakers. The God who give us the gift of faith, the gift of life, the gift of joining our praises with all of God's creation and all of God's people.

It is because of our love for our God that we are going to be invited next week on Consecration Sunday to name one of the ways we will be stewards as we bring our pledges for 2020.

For those of you who are new to us, you may be wondering why we call it Consecration Sunday. When we consecrate something, we set aside something from its ordinary use to give it a sacred, or holy use. Next week we will name how we will set aside some of our finances in 2020 to be used for God and God's people inside and outside the walls of First Presbyterian Church.

In the mail this week, you received a pledge card that you can use to name what you plan to give next year. If you don't have a pledge card there are more of them on the table on the way to the doughnuts. Next week at the end of worship, we will show that we are giving these gifts to God by bringing them up to the front of the church at the end of worship.

We are stewards of all that God has put into our lives. One of the ways we are stewards is seen in our pledges on Consecration Sunday.

But stewardship isn't just about giving and spending money; it's about how we are spending all of our lives! So, in your November newsletter you will find a Time and Talent questionnaire, created by your Session, that you will be asked to fill in and return.

It will offer you many ways to "get your turn" at serving God inside our walls and outside our walls.

Stewardship is about giving back to God in the midst of our day to day living, using all that God has given to us.

It is a gift and a privilege to show our love for our God, who in the words of the Psalmist is: "the God who is the hope of all the ends of the earth and of the farthest seas."

As we look forward to those Time and Talents Questionnaires, I want to conclude with another story Sheila sent me, that I've also heard as a devotion at one of our commission meetings. It's a wonderful picture of someone 'getting their turn' at being a steward.

One cold winter's day a 10-year-old boy was standing barefoot in front of a shoe store, peering through the window, and shivering with cold. A lady approached the boy and asked him what he was doing.

"I was asking God to give me a pair of shoes," the boy replied.

The lady took him by the hand and went into the store, and asked the clerk to get a half dozen pairs of socks for the boy. She then asked if he could give her a basin of water and a towel. He quickly brought them to her. She took the boy to the back part of the store, knelt down, washed his little feet, and dried them with a towel.

By this time the clerk had returned with the socks. Placing a pair upon the boy's feet, she then purchased him a pair of shoes, and ~~tying~~ bagging up the remaining pairs of socks, gave them to him. She patted him on the head and said, "No doubt, my little fellow, you feel more comfortable now?"

As she turned to go, the astonished lad caught her by the hand, and looking up in her face, with tears in his eyes, answered the question with these words: "Are you God's wife?"

We are God's stewards, God's caretakers, God's partners, with all that our expansive, creative God has put into our lives.

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 10<sup>th</sup> decade of life, or somewhere in-between we are all completely prepared as stewards and caretakers of God's good gifts.

May we join our joy with the pastures, and hills and meadows and valleys who shout and sing together in joy to their God,  
 because now WE get to take OUR turn! Amen.