

FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

East Moline, Illinois

Pastor Becky Sherwood

October 24, 2021, The 22nd Sunday After Pentecost/The 29th Sunday of Ordinary Time

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

The Stewardship of Life–Giving Gifts To Our Giftgiver

Right now, in this very minute, with all that your lives hold,
 yes, even in the midst of a world pandemic
 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, middle school, high school, or 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.
 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 diverse 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, and in school.

On this week before Consecration Sunday, I want you to know that, yes!, I'm preaching the stewardship sermon a week early. I'm not doing this to catch you off guard, but so that you have something to think about this week as you, or you and your household, fill in your pledge cards and mail them to church this week, or bring them to church next Sunday.

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.

True stewardship is about committing ourselves to being gift-givers to God for all of our lives. All that we have belongs to God, just as our bulletin cover this morning quotes from Psalm 24: "The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it, the world and all who live in it..."
 Stewardship is not just about how we give financially to the ministry of the church, it's also about how we give from all of our lives to God. God has made us care givers, or stewards, of so many things.

So, we are called to look for the ways we can be gift-givers to God. This is a response of thanksgiving to our God for the things we've been given.
 We are invited to be good stewards of our faith, our gifts and talents, the creation around us, and our world citizenship.

Stewardship is not about our financial statements, our annual budget, our proposed 2022 budget, or the bottom line of where we are financially at the end of each month.

Because of this, you may be thinking you're going to get through this morning 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, next Sunday 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 the pastor to a church full of stewards and gift-givers. 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, or you tell me what time and day you like to worship God with our service on YouTube.

You are stewards of your time when you come to God's Kidz Sunday School, and Youth Sunday School, and Presbyterian Woman Bible studies, and Zoom gatherings for the Year with the Bible, and as you read your Bible at home.

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 youth.

I watch our children and youth as stewards who come to hear, to learn, to create, and enjoy friends. I watch their parents and caregivers be stewards of their time as they make the effort on Sunday mornings to get up and dressed and into the Sunday School room at 8:45 a.m.

You are also stewards of your faith when you share from your lives in adult Sunday School classes that are meeting now, and those that will one day meet again.

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 in the past as you did things, we will one day return to: singing in the choir and youth choir, and puppet presentations. Plus, ringing bells which has returned already.

I've heard about the ways you cared for each other during these long months of the pandemic with food, cards, calls, delivering groceries, and prayers for each other. I am so thankful for our Elders and Deacons who called all the friends and members of the church during our months of separation from each other.

You are stewards of time and love at church, at school, in the community, when you reach out to someone who is hurting,
 sit beside someone who is looks lonely,
 when you make time to listen to someone who has a story that needs to be told,
 stand up to bullying,
 speak up when silence does harm,
 when you find ways to bridge the many things that divide us,
 invite someone into your group who needs a place to belong,
 and invite someone to come to worship with you.

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 next week, having decided on your own, or decided 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, bulletins and newsletters get folded, prayer shawls get knitted and crocheted, and as repairs are creatively made around the building.

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 an usher, or running the new sound and camera system.

I see your stewardship in the world as you gather pop tabs for the Shriner's Hospital, cancelled stamps for cancer research, and old glasses so they can give someone else sight.

I see stewardship in action as you fill the grocery cart for the Watertown Food Pantry, or drop your change in the change jar to help those recovering from the Hurricanes

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 100th year as a Presbyterian Congregation, and each of you is part of that history. And the day WILL come that we will celebrate that anniversary in person!

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 hopes and prayers are that each one of us, from the youngest to the oldest, 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 thousands 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, next Sunday is a 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 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 next Sunday to be God's cheerful givers, as we are able, 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!