

The Good Shepherd Enables Us to Be Good Stewards.

September 11, 2022 – The 14th Sunday after Pentecost
Good Shepherd Ev. Lutheran Church, Beaver Dam, Wisconsin

Our three Scripture readings this morning direct our focus to three gifts God has given to us, which we can use to serve him and the his kingdom.

Genesis 6:1-3, 9-22 – TIME

When human beings began to increase in number on the earth and daughters were born to them, ² the sons of God saw that the daughters of humans were beautiful, and they married any of them they chose. ³ Then the LORD said, “My Spirit will not contend with^[a] humans forever, for they are mortal^[b]; their days will be a hundred and twenty years.”

⁹ *This is the account of Noah and his family.*

Noah was a righteous man, blameless among the people of his time, and he walked faithfully with God. ¹⁰ Noah had three sons: Shem, Ham and Japheth.

¹¹ *Now the earth was corrupt in God’s sight and was full of violence. ¹² God saw how corrupt the earth had become, for all the people on earth had corrupted their ways. ¹³ So God said to Noah, “I am going to put an end to all people, for the earth is filled with violence because of them. I am surely going to destroy both them and the earth. ¹⁴ So make yourself an ark of cypress^[c] wood; make rooms in it and coat it with pitch inside and out. ¹⁵ This is how you are to build it: The ark is to be three hundred cubits long, fifty cubits wide and thirty cubits high.^[d] ¹⁶ Make a roof for it, leaving below the roof an opening one cubit^[e] high all around.^[f] Put a door in the side of the ark and make lower, middle and upper decks. ¹⁷ I am going to bring floodwaters on the earth to destroy all life under the heavens, every creature that has the breath of life in it. Everything on earth will perish. ¹⁸ But I will establish my covenant with you, and you will enter the ark—you and your sons and your wife and your sons’ wives with you. ¹⁹ You are to bring into the ark two of all living creatures, male and female, to keep them alive with you. ²⁰ Two of every kind of bird, of every kind of animal and of every kind of creature that moves along the ground will come to you to be kept alive. ²¹ You are to take every kind of food that is to be eaten and store it away as food for you and for them.”*

²² *Noah did everything just as God commanded him.*

What’s the largest building project you have ever undertaken? Perhaps the house you live in; or your cabin in the north woods. How was it accomplished? Whom did you hire to plan and carry out the project? An architect and/or designer? Who was your contractor? How many sub-contractors did he bring in? Where did the materials come from? What kind of equipment and tools were used to carry out your project? How long did it take to complete? All important questions for a modern day building project!

Think about the magnitude of what God asked to Noah to do! Build an ark from cypress wood. Make it 450 feet long, 75 feet wide, four stories tall. Scripture doesn’t tell us a thing about how Noah and his family accomplished the building of the ark, but we have to wonder -- From where did he get the materials? Supply his own? How did he work four stories in the air? What tools did he use? Where did the pitch to seal the joints come from? The building project took 120 years to complete. And he even had to gather enough food for all the animals that God would bring to the ark.

What was the reaction of the people around this most unusual project? We aren’t told, but we can well imagine the ridicule that came against Noah and his family.

Moses tell us that **“Noah did everything just as God commanded him.”** (.22) Moses says that Noah was **“a righteous man”** (v. 9). He was righteous not because he was sinless. He was righteous because his faith was centered on the Promised Messiah, who would remove the burden of sin and guilt. The author of the New Testament letter to the Hebrews says this about Noah: ***By faith Noah, when warned about things not yet***

seen, in holy fear built an ark to save his family. By his faith he condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness that is in keeping with faith. (Hebrews 11:7)

Though it may seem preposterous to us, Noah used the time God had given him to follow the Lord's will. During those 120 years was he ever tempted to give up? I say, "Probably." Surely the devil tempted him to think that this was a silly, useless project. But Noah stuck to the task. He used his time to fulfil the Lord's will for him.

God has given each of us a certain amount of time and to carry out our "ark-building" responsibilities. Moses prays in Psalm 90 a prayer that is appropriate for Christian stewards (That's each of us.) *Teach us to number our days aright, that we may gain a heart of wisdom (Psalm 90:12).* Maybe our assignment doesn't seem as clear as it was for Noah. But as we listen to our gracious God as he speaks to us through the Scriptures, we find some pretty clear responsibilities that God has for us for our time in this world. Jesus says: *"Blessed are those who hear the word of God and obey it."* (Luke 11:28) Spending time in the Scriptures on own, with our families, and together with fellow believers certainly has to be high on our list of good use of our time. The well-known parable of the Good Samaritan reminds us that God wants to be neighborly to use our time for the care and compassion of the needy. At the beginning of his Sermon on the Mount Jesus spoke the Beatitudes which guide us in the good use of our times. *"Blessed are the merciful . . . Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called the sons of God. (Matthew 5:7 & 9).*

We should also think about ways that devil will direct us to misuse our gift of time. Modern conveniences like television, mobile phones, and the internet are tremendous blessings, but they also can become so captivating that we lose our focus on our Savior and serving him. In these times of instant gratification the devil will tempt us to focus on ourselves and our personal desires.

So remember Noah and how he righteously used 120 years to serve the Lord by following his will. Strive to be a modern day Noah!

1 Corinthians 16:1-2; 2 Corinthians 8:8-12; 9:6-7 -- TREASURES

16:1 Now about the collection for the Lord's people: Do what I told the Galatian churches to do. 2 On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with your income, saving it up, so that when I come no collections will have to be made.

8:8 I am not commanding you, but I want to test the sincerity of your love by comparing it with the earnestness of others. 9 For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich. 10 And here is my judgment about what is best for you in this matter. Last year you were the first not only to give but also to have the desire to do so. 11 Now finish the work, so that your eager willingness to do it may be matched by your completion of it, according to your means. 12 For if the willingness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has, not according to what one does not have.

9:6 Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. 7 Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.

This set of reading comes from St. Paul's instructions to the Christians in Corinth. They speak specifically about gathering an offering that Paul could take to Jerusalem to help the believers there who, who were being severely persecuted. We want to remember that Scripture points out four ways that God wants us to use the treasures (income, wealth, money, possessions). In addition to our offerings for the work of the church the Bible guides us to care for families, to help the needy, and to pay taxes.

Before this morning we are directed to consider the principles of Christian giving. With the verses from chapter 16 we see that God wants our giving to be a priority (*"on the first day of the week" v. 2*). This means

that we will intentionally plan our giving, making it a regular, vital, top item of our budget. This also directs us to proportionate giving (*"in keeping with your income"- v. 2*). As our income increases we are reminded to increase our giving as well. And if our income decreases, it is not sinful to reduce our income (*"For if the willingness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has, not according to what one does not have."* – 8:12).

Another principle of Christian giving is in chapter nine – God want our giving to be willing. He doesn't want gifts that are given to try to earn his favor or from a heart that considers it a duty to God. *"Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, no reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver."* (9:7). The final principle of Christian giving (and I think that most important) is our motivation for giving. When we are properly motivated our giving will fall in line with the principles we have already considered. *"For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich."* (8:9). As you consider the finances which the Lord has entrusted to your care, always remember what heavenly luxury Jesus gave up in order to rescue us from sin and damnation. Our offerings are a giving of thanks for his life of humility and agony on our behalf. As we [pan and present our offerings we rejoice in his resurrection which assure us that we are members of his family and that he has a place for us in the glories of heaven.

As we remember his love, we will be guided to follow these principles of Christian giving.

Luke 19:12-27 -- TALENTS

¹² He said: "A man of noble birth went to a distant country to have himself appointed king and then to return. ¹³ So he called ten of his servants and gave them ten minas.^[a] 'Put this money to work,' he said, 'until I come back.'

¹⁴ "But his subjects hated him and sent a delegation after him to say, 'We don't want this man to be our king.'

¹⁵ "He was made king, however, and returned home. Then he sent for the servants to whom he had given the money, in order to find out what they had gained with it.

¹⁶ "The first one came and said, 'Sir, your mina has earned ten more.'

¹⁷ "'Well done, my good servant!' his master replied. 'Because you have been trustworthy in a very small matter, take charge of ten cities.'

¹⁸ "The second came and said, 'Sir, your mina has earned five more.'

¹⁹ "His master answered, 'You take charge of five cities.'

²⁰ "Then another servant came and said, 'Sir, here is your mina; I have kept it laid away in a piece of cloth. ²¹ I was afraid of you, because you are a hard man. You take out what you did not put in and reap what you did not sow.'

²² "His master replied, 'I will judge you by your own words, you wicked servant! You knew, did you, that I am a hard man, taking out what I did not put in, and reaping what I did not sow? ²³ Why then didn't you put my money on deposit, so that when I came back, I could have collected it with interest?'

²⁴ "Then he said to those standing by, 'Take his mina away from him and give it to the one who has ten minas.'

²⁵ "'Sir,' they said, 'he already has ten!'

²⁶ "He replied, 'I tell you that to everyone who has, more will be given, but as for the one who has nothing, even what they have will be taken away. ²⁷ But those enemies of mine who did not want me to be king over them—bring them here and kill them in front of me.'"

So what was your reaction as you heard me read this parable? Was it: "Pastor, you just talked about money. Now you're at it again! It would be easy to draw that conclusion. The parable talks about a member of the royalty giving minas to servants. A mina was equal to about three months' wages, so we are talking about a significant amount of money. But when we consider the setting of this parable we can see that Jesus is talking about using the abilities that he has given us. Jesus was passing through Jericho on his final journey to

Jerusalem. As he was passing through a tax collector, a short man named Zacchaeus, climbed a tree to see this teacher he had heard so much about. So Jesus invited himself to Zacchaeus' house. Having encountered Jesus and recognizing him as the promised Messiah Zacchaeus said, *"Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything. I will payback four times the amount?" (Luke 19:8) "Jesus said to him, 'Today salvation has come to this house because this man, too, is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost.'" (Luke 19:8-9)* Zacchaeus had a contract with the hated Roman government. He was to turn over to the Romans a certain amount of taxes. Whatever he collected more than that amount he kept for himself. That is why the tax collectors were one of the most despised group of people in Jewish society. Zacchaeus is now determined to use his ability as a tax collector to restore every wrongly-gained tax.

Jesus continues teaching with this parable about the minas. His point is that he wants us to use the abilities he has given us as best we can. He is the giver of all of our talents and opportunities. We honor him when we are diligent in using those abilities for the good of our family and communities. That is what Peter was talking about in the verse of the day which we just heard. Listen to it again with the addition of the next verse: *¹⁰ Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms. ¹¹ If anyone speaks, they should do so as one who speaks the very words of God. If anyone serves, they should do so with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen. (1 Peter 4:10-11)*

God has given a diversity of gifts. He has given each of us a varying character and amount of gifts. Each of us is a unique and vital component in God's kingdom. We serve the Giver of these gifts and the people of his kingdom when we are careful to determine what gifts he has given us and then use them faithfully. Our Savior Jesus enables us. He has forgiven our sins and reserved a place in heaven for us. Therefore as we keep focused on him, we will use the gifts wisely and diligently. St. Paul wrote to the Corinthians: *"Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain." (1 Corinthians 15:58)* With our focus on Jesus we can strive to faithfully use our talents for his service, even when we face challenges and endure setbacks. Peter tells us: *And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast. (1 Peter 5:10)*

So, this morning, with our three Scripture lessons, we are reminded that we have been entrusted with time, talents, and treasures. We haven't always been perfect in using these gifts from our God. But just as Jesus assured Zacchaeus that he was forgiven, so he wants us, too, to have that assurance. With our spiritual focus on Jesus and his forgiveness we have the reason and the strength to be good stewards, that is good users and caretakers, of all that he has given us. May God bless you as you consider what he has given you. Then go and use these gifts to serve him. Amen.

Pastor Joel Jaeger