

Stewardship Reflections
Revised Common Lectionary – Year B

Advent I “*Yet, O Lord, you are our father; we are the clay and you are the potter.*” God wants to shape us to be the kind of vessels that reflect his unlimited giving and grace. He offers Himself as the model par excellence. He has given so much to each of us. Do we do our best to reflect his generosity by our own giving?

Advent II Isaiah’s reading ends “*he will feed his flock like a shepherd...carry the lambs...and gently lead the mother sheep*”. If we believe that he indeed carries and leads us, is it not our joyful duty to follow His example by doing the same for others – both here in the parish and beyond our walls? Being a faithful steward is part of what helps us follow his example.

Advent III Because of Sunday’s Collect, some call Advent III “stir-up” Sunday. As stewards, how do we seek to be stirred-up so we may faithfully respond to God’s will for us in this journey of life we travel? What are the tools we use so we might be fashioned into the bread and nourishment God wants not only for us, but for us to share with others?

Advent IV “*My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord; my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour.*” If we truly believe these words, as Mary witnessed she did (through the best and the worst), how are our love of God and response to His commission to us reflected in our daily lives and interactions with others – not just at this “official” season of giving, but all year through?

Christmas “*Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth to those whom he favors*”. And we are among the favored ones. He has showered us with blessings too many to count - and now at Christmas time, we remember the glorious gift of his Son. In how many ways can we offer thanks and gratitude for this awesome gift?

First Sunday after Christmas “*...you have poured upon us the new light of your incarnate Word: Grant that this light, enkindled in our hearts, may shine forth in our lives...*” What kind of light shines through you to reflect your love of God, and your desire to spread that light in the service of others?

Second Sunday after Christmas “*Grant that we may share the divine life of him who humbled himself to share our humanity...*” How is the divine life reflected in us as we go about our daily lives? Do we strive to have others see the face and hands of Jesus in us? Perhaps it’s not too late to make such a resolution for the coming year.

January 1 – Holy Name Today’s Numbers reading recalls the Aaronic blessing...“*the Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face to shine upon you, and be gracious unto you; the Lord lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace.*” And gracious to us He has been and continues to be! What kind of stewards are we? How do our lives reflect his face shining upon us?

January 6 – The Feast of the Epiphany Herod commanded the Magi “*to go and seek diligently for the child...*” As grateful disciples and stewards, we need also to search for Jesus, to listen to his teachings, to worship together as a supporting community, and to carry out his mandate to love and serve others in his name. May we always be led by the star of his generous and eternal love.

The Baptism of Christ Our Baptismal Covenant will be renewed in most churches today. Look at the verbs in the statements: Continue in the prayers and teaching; persevere in resisting evil and repent; proclaim the Good News; seek and serve others; strive for justice and peace. Are our time, talents and resources being used to further these “marching orders”?

Epiphany 2 Psalm 139:1 says “*...you have searched me out and known me...*” To grow as grateful stewards, we need to really, in our hearts (not just in our words), trust that God indeed has a plan for us – and to spend serious time attempting to discern just what that plan is. When the heart is converted, being a good steward becomes a joy and not a duty.

Epiphany 3 In the calling of the fishermen, what word is repeated to indicate their enthusiasm? Immediately! Are we in the habit of responding to God's call to us immediately, or is our answer "maybe sometime I can become your diligent and faithful follower, but right now _____ (you fill in the blank) is much more important." Where would the Church be today if the disciples, and the many faithful who came after, had made such a response?

Epiphany 4 *Psalm 11:1 says "I will give thanks to the Lord with my whole heart..."* Our Catechism (see the Prayer Book, p. 856) has at least one set of suggestions about how to do this. We are to follow Christ, to come together week by week for corporate worship, and to work, pray, and give for the spread of his kingdom. What a concise list for a "steward-in-training"!

Epiphany 5 Psalm 147 is a veritable litany of God's gifts to the world, and we - yes, you and I - are considered to be among those wonderful works. God yearns for a loving and grateful response from those He has created. Is such a response evident to others by the way your life is lived?

Epiphany 6 Naaman is not impressed with the simple order that comes to him from God by Elisha; he wants the bells and whistles and the magic. But his servants convinced him to heed the prophet, and his leprosy was quietly cured. Are we, too, often not aware of the real but quiet interventions in our lives by the God who loves and cares for us?

Epiphany 7 Part of Psalm 41 says "*The Lord sustains them on their sickbed, and ministers to them in their illness.*". Sometimes it is hard for us to believe this. Sometimes our prayers for healing and wholeness for ourselves or others do not seem to be answered. But who knows what kind of healing God provides? We now "*look through a glass dimly*". But faith tells us that one day we will have answers and understanding about the things that so perplex us here.

Epiphany 8 Mark's Gospel talks about Jesus's having a meal with the local tax collector – not considered to be one of the "in" people. But when questioned, Jesus said, "*I have come to call not the righteous, but sinners.*" Since that includes all of us, perhaps we should remember L. L. Nash's comforting saying "*The church is a hospital for sinners, not a museum for saints,*" as we try to live out our Christian steward's life in our local worshipping communities.

Last Epiphany "*Farewell to Alleluia*" Sunday is an ironic reminder to us that the journey of stewards includes not only the "up" celebrations of Christmas and Epiphany, but also calls us to intentional sharing in Christ's journey to Jerusalem and the Cross. How will you strengthen your spiritual and stewardship life during this approaching Lent?

Ash Wednesday There are two key steward's reminders in today's lessons. Psalm 103 urges us to "*Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits*", and the conclusion of Matthew's Gospel passage points out that we need to choose carefully what our life treasures are to be, and to whom or what they will be committed.

Lent I Psalm 25 says in part: "*Show me your ways, O Lord, and teach me your paths...*" Do we depend on reading and study, regular worship with our parish family, generous thankful giving, and regular prayer time to help us be open to what the Lord my indeed want to show us?

Lent II "*No distrust made him waver concerning the promise of God...(he was) fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised.*" Are we striving to bring the same faith to our spiritual and stewardship lives? The idea of absolute trust in our Creator can be an elusive idea to wrap our hearts and minds around!

Lent III Not only as part of the Penitential Order, used often during Lent, but in Sunday's Old Testament lesson, are the Ten Commandments outlined. Even as we remember and honor those mandates, we look toward Maundy Thursday and Jesus' offering not only of Himself, but of a new Covenant - that we should *love one another as He has loved us*. If we seriously commit to making this love and respect an integral part of our daily lives, we have our spiritual/stewardship work cut out for us indeed!

Lent IV “For God so loved the world, that He gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but have everlasting life”. When we think about giving and receiving, there is no more unselfish and eternally blessed gift than the one God has given us with "no strings attached" - except the desire to have us return that love to Him and share it with others in our lives.

Lent V “Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also.” What a blueprint for a steward to follow! Love the Lord, follow and serve Him, and reflect his immeasurable love to all whose lives touch yours - and a rewarding life both now and eternally is God's promise!

Palm Sunday Psalm 31:16 says “Make your face to shine upon your servant, and in your loving kindness save me. And our ever-loving God reaches out with all his mercy, time after time, to bring help and consolation to those who put their whole trust in Him as faithful stewards of his blessings and gifts.

The Easter Vigil The stories told at the Easter Vigil repeat time after time, the many ways in which God has entered the lives of His people in saving and grace-filled manifestations. And he has promised to live in us and through us, too, as we allow Him to undergird our daily lives of discipleship. Alleluia! Alleluia!

The Feast of the Resurrection From Psalm 118: “On this day the Lord has acted; we will rejoice and be glad in it.” What a wonderful reminder that the Lord we have committed to follow as stewards, disciples, and apprentices is alive and well. Alleluia! Alleluia!

Easter 2 What a directive for stewards we have today. “...grant that all who have been reborn into the fellowship of Christ's body may show forth in their lives what they profess by their faith...” How is our “profess-ing” going?

Easter 3 Psalm 4:6 says “Many are saying, “Oh, that we might see better times! Lift up the light of your countenance upon us, O Lord.” There is an old saying – “If God seems far away, guess who’s moved?” As faithful stewards, we need to learn to stay close to God, and to worship and thank Him at all times for all things. Who knows what ‘better times’ that might bring – or how we might become much more aware of ‘the light of his countenance’ in our lives?

Easter 4 Hired hand or shepherd? Jesus says the hired hand runs away because he does not really care for the sheep. The shepherd, on the other hand, will lay down his own life for his flock. Do we run away from service to others, or are we willing to give of our own lives in the name of the God who loves us, and gave His all for us?

Easter 5 When Philip hastens to the Ethiopian’s chariot, it is to help him understand his unfamiliar reading- and to interpret it in the light of Jesus as the Good News. As “stewards in training”, what part does the intentional study of Scripture play in our search to know and serve God – and to then proclaim the Good News to others?

6 Easter “You did not choose me, but I chose you”. On a much more trivial scale, can you remember the child-like elation of being chosen for a team, for a part in a play, for a special class project? Shouldn’t it be a natural and gladsome thing, then, to love and serve the Holy One, the Creator of the Universe, who first loved and chose you as special to Him?

7 Easter Part of Acts:1 talks about the naming of a new apostle to replace Judas. The Disciples named two men who “went in and out among us”, and asked God, who knows all hearts, to assist them in their choice. Suppose you were in that situation today. What in your heart would tell God about your love and giving and service to Him?

The Day of Pentecost Psalm 104 says in part “All of them look to you to give them their food in due season. You give it to them...you open your hand and they are filled with good things.” How’s that for a faithful steward’s reason to always and everywhere give thanks? God gives us everything we have – how can we thank Him adequately except by returning a faithful share of all those gifts to Him and to others in His name?

Trinity Sunday *For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in Him may not perish, but may have eternal life.* If we believe in Him, He will know that by the lives we live, and the thanks we give for that (as the 1928 BCP says) inestimable gift – and that’s what stewardship is all about!

The Season of Pentecost

(Note: Check for correct dates for each Proper, since, depending on the dates of Easter, Pentecost, and Trinity, they may fall differently from year to year...i.e., the first Sunday after Trinity may be any of Propers 3*, 4, 5, or 6 – depending on how early Easter falls. * If there is a Proper 3 scheduled, the Proper for the 8th Sunday after Epiphany is used.

Proper 3 Mark’s Gospel talks about Jesus’s having a meal with the local tax collector – not considered to be one of the “in” people. But when questioned, Jesus said, *“I have come to call not the righteous, but sinners.* Since that includes all of us, perhaps we should remember L. L. Nash’s comforting saying *“The church is a hospital for sinners, not a museum for saints,”* as we try to live out our Christian steward’s life in our local worshipping communities.

Proper 4 In Mark’s Gospel, Jesus is being watched by the “rule-keepers”, to see if they might find ways to condemn him. But as in all his life, Jesus acted in the loving way – allowing the disciples to pick grain for food, and healing the man’s withered hand. Do we as stewards and apprentices of Jesus remember to make our life-decisions in the loving way God has modeled for us over and over?

Proper 5 *“O God, from whom all good proceeds...”*. If, therefore, all the good in our lives comes from God, how can we best be grateful and thankful for our many blessings? Perhaps the Holy Habits of prayer, scripture study, active participation in our parish community, care for others, and generous giving can help us reflect that “good-ness” to others.

Proper 6 The mustard seed – smallest of the seeds on earth. Yet when it is sown, it grows up and becomes the greatest of all the shrubs, and serves others as a haven. Were our lives as stewards sown as small as the mustard seed, and have they grown and blossomed as we hear God’s voice, thank Him for His gifts, and seek to serve Him in others?

Proper 7 When Jesus awakes and calms the sea, he says to the Disciples, *“Why are you afraid? Have you no faith?”* Good questions for the reluctant steward. Why are we so afraid to return to God a generous portion – but just a portion – of what he has so lovingly given us – everything!

Proper 8 The woman who in desperation believed if only she could touch Jesus she would be healed was right. Jesus saw her faith and freed her from her years of (in those days) shameful illness. Those of us who can no longer touch Jesus in the flesh have no less claim to His promise to heal us (perhaps in a different way than we expected) - but we need to believe, believe, believe, and trust in His promises!

Proper 9 Mark’s Gospel says Jesus ordered the disciples to take nothing for their journey – no bread, no bag, no money, no extra clothes, etc. What a venture of trust in God and other people He was asking them to begin! Our commitment to the faithful stewardship of all we have been given should seem a small task in comparison.

Proper 10 Ephesians says in part... *“In him, we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace he lavished on us...”* Can we even begin to comprehend the riches of his grace freely given to us, and if we do, will we commit to a life of service and thankfulness for those many gifts?

Proper 11 Jesus recognizes that the disciples may be in danger of what we today call “burnout”. He urges them to *“come aside and rest awhile.”* What kind of resting stewardship do we practice in our own hectic or otherwise complicated lives? How much quiet time do we give to God in prayer, study, and meditation to help us “recharge our spiritual batteries” and continue in faithful, loving service to the God who has given us all?

Proper 12 The miracle of the loaves and fishes parable is a reminder for all of us attempting to be good stewards, that if we have faith, God will provide far more than we need - and help us to fulfill the needs of others in His name as well. Here's a Grace for Meals you might like to use as a reminder in the coming week. *"Christ in the wilderness five thousand fed, with two small fishes and five loaves of bread. May the God above who made that division, descend upon us and our provision. Amen.*

Proper 13 One of the favorite hymns of many folks in the Diocese of Bethlehem (literally in Hebrew, "house of bread") is # 335, *"I Am the Bread of Life"*. The last two sentences of today's Gospel remind us of those comforting words. *"Jesus said to them, I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty."* What a promise on which those striving to be good stewards can build their life with their Creator!

The Transfiguration – August 6 *"This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to Him!"* Jesus' teachings provide us with all the lessons we need to live faithful, honest, and productive lives--also as God's "chosen". At Baptism, the cross is sealed on our foreheads, and we are *"marked as Christ's own forever."* Stewardship is about how we respond to that freely given gift of grace, and how we offer thanks with grateful hearts and lives to the God who gives us all.

Proper 14 In Ephesians, we are told *"...be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another as God in Christ has forgiven you. Therefore, be imitators of God as beloved children, and live in love as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God."* How do we "show forth in our daily lives" our gratitude and thanks for this greatest of freely-given gifts?

Proper 15 Ephesians says in part, *"...singing and making melody to the Lord in your hearts, giving thanks to God the Father at all times and for everything..."* We are not asked to be thankful just when it is easy or convenient; that's simple. Rather, we are asked to undergird all our lives with trust and gratitude for God's vision for us through the highs and lows that come to all of us...a spiritual challenge indeed!

Proper 16 John 6: says in part, *"...no one can come to me unless it is granted by the Father..."*. Through our Baptism, we have been granted that supreme gift for the whole of our lives. Does the stewardship of our lives reflect our unceasing gratitude to God for His unfailing mercy to us?

Proper 17 We read in James:1, *"Every generous act of giving, with every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father..."*. If this is true, does our giving of all things - ourselves in service to others, our financial resources to support the Church, our loving responses to those around us – reflect God's abundant giving, or our more scarcity-oriented attitudes?

Note: Dates vary, of course, but the two following reflections are meant to be used near Labor Day and whenever your start-up Sunday is scheduled. Adapt as you need/choose to.

"A suggestion for this Labor Day weekend: As a way of being always thankful for God's many gifts, read the Litanies of Thanksgiving in our Prayer Book – particularly number 2 on p. 836, and number 5 on page 838 – they are good reminders for all of us."

"In many parishes, this is "start-again Sunday" – especially for Choirs, Church Schools, and Education programs. Give special thanks for all who lead those programs, and pray about how, as a disciple and steward, you might offer yourself to serve others in those ministries. Being thankful involves not only prayer, but action and participation!"

Proper 18 Part of Mark's Gospel deals with the healing of the deaf man. The phrase Jesus uses is "*Ephphatha*", which translates as "*be opened*". Perhaps this phrase should be part of our prayer as stewards. Do we have faith enough to ask God to help us be open with all our lives and resources as a joyful response to His gifts, which are indeed too many to number?

Proper 19 In Mark 8:, Jesus says: *But who do you say that I am?* Your relationship with Jesus - personal or impersonal, constant presence in your life or "God, please help me just this one time, and I'll never...", savior and true friend or distant hazy religious figure – no doubt has a great deal to do with your life as a steward. Who do you say that He is? Wouldn't your stewardship life be more meaningful if you could see Him as constant presence, true friend, and personal savior? He wants to be all of those things you know!

Proper 20 From part of James:3: "*But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without a trace of partiality or hypocrisy.*" Put that list on your mirror and try to live by these good stepping-stones for faithful stewards – difficult indeed to attain, but gratitude-creating when you have some success!

Proper 21 "*Grant us the fullness of your grace, that we, running to obtain your promises, may become partakers of your heavenly treasure.*" Isn't this what stewardship is all about? It's not the treasure that's important here; it's growing our relationship with God in faithful expectation of the as yet unknown blessings to come.

Proper 22 Jesus says *Let the little children come to me...for it is to such of these that the kingdom of heaven is given.* Can we trust as children do? Can we lay our lives in His hands, trusting His plan for us...and respond with gratitude and thanksgiving for all? Will we let Him *lay his hands on us and bless us?*

Proper 23 In Mark:10, we read "*How hard it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God.*" All of us have much wealth, you know, especially by the standard of many in the rest of the world. We are so blessed! As stewards and disciples, are we willing to live our lives and use all our gifts to honor God and follow His teachings?

Proper 24 Mark10:45 puts it very succinctly: *The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many.* What gift can we ever give to thank Him for His incredible gift to us? Living life as a steward and disciple, and following the Lord's examples and teachings is certainly a good place to start!

Proper 25 Mark tells us that Bartimaeus had faith that Jesus could heal him. The disciples tried to shoo him away, but he was persistent, and Jesus answered his plea. What is it in our lives that blinds us, and lets us shoo ourselves away from believing in, and accepting the grace and mercy of our God? As Stewards with restored vision, we can serve in ways that are yet unknown to us if we pray for our own blindness to be healed!

For an All Saints Day celebration A favorite hymn, often used at All Saints Day celebrations is # 287, "*For all the Saints...*" Who are the saints now on the "Godward" side of your life who encourage you to give thanks, not only for their lives by your examples of loving discipleship, but also by your willingness to be ever grateful for all they know (and you know) God has given you? This is our particular day to remember all the blessed saints – especially those who have gone before us here, having served God faithfully in this parish. They were good and diligent stewards – quietly and continually supporting His work in many ways while living lives of integrity and courage. May it be yet another of God's gifts for us to join them at the banquet when our days here are done. *Let light perpetual shine upon them.*

Proper 26 The Summary of the law says it all...love God with all your heart, mind and soul, and your neighbor as yourself. It seems like such an insurmountable task. Who could possibly do this adequately? But as some of the 12-Step groups say, “*We strive for progress, not perfection.*” God knows we can’t possibly completely attain these goals, but he honored and satisfied if our efforts are reflected in a life lived in faith, gratitude for his gifts, and loving service to others.

Proper 27 “*For all of them have contributed out of their abundance; but she out of her poverty has put in all that she had...*” This is frequently the time when we as congregations make our financial commitments to the parishes (and hopefully, to the gracious God we profess to love) whose programs and ministries we want to support. Just for a moment, imagine what our offerings would be if we all faithfully gave from our abundance in thanksgiving for our uncountable blessings. As the young often say, it would be truly “awesome”!

Proper 28 Today’s Collect is the well-known (at least in the Episcopal Church), “*grant that we may read, mark, learn and inwardly digest*” plea for understanding of the Scriptures. Part of life as a disciple and steward is taking intentional time for prayer and the study of those Scriptures. Have you made that part of your daily routine?

Last Pentecost – Proper 29 As we come to the end of the Church Year, and look forward to the quiet of Advent and then to the wonderful stories of the Gift of our Savior’s birth retold, take some time to reflect on how your life as a disciple and steward has gone this year. Pray for discernment and guidance to “grow your gratitude” and serve God in new ways in the months to come.