

Stewardship Reflections
Revised Common Lectionary ...**Year C**

Advent 1 As we begin a new Church Year, the words of the Psalmist are good advice for a steward who wants to “grow in the Lord” – “*Show me your ways, O Lord, and teach me your paths. Lead me in your truth and teach me.*” Maybe these are verses to keep where we will see them daily – in our Bible or Prayer Book, on the bathroom mirror, or in any often viewed spot, where we can read them often and engrave them on our hearts.

Advent 2 Paul talks about “*producing a harvest of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ for the glory and praise of God.*” As disciples and stewards, how does our daily life, and our gratitude to God for all His gifts reflect for others “the glory and praise of God”? How can we best work at being good “harvesters”?

Advent 3 Zephaniah describes God’s love and joy in us. “*He will rejoice over you with gladness, he will renew you in his love; he will exult over you with loud singing.*” God yearns for us to respond to him in the same glorious and enthusiastic way he models for us. Caring stewards use the holy habits of prayer, study, worship in community, and generous giving to respond to the Lord’s overwhelming, freely-given gifts.

Advent 4 How blessed we are to hear again some of the phrases from Mary’s song of praise: “*He has mercy on those who fear him...he has lifted up the lowly...he has filled the hungry with good things...he has come to the help of his servant*”. The blessings outlined in the *Magnificat* continue to be given to us in a multitude of ways. As this holy season begins, let us be especially grateful that God continues to be willing to uphold all of us in our daily lives.

Christmas Eve/Christmas Day – December 24-25 1) God’s greatest gift is given to us – his very own self, incarnate, born to live on the earth as a daily witness of God’s continual presence and love. Can we even begin to understand and value this priceless offering? How does our life as a Christian steward reflect our humble gratitude for this incomprehensible gift? **Or** 2) One of the Christmas Collects says in part: “*Grant that we who have been born again and made your children by adoption and grace, may daily be renewed by your Holy Spirit...*”; perhaps we can add to that prayer, “*and may we be given the extension of that grace to enable us to live and grow as your grateful stewards and disciples.*”

The 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...*” could very well be part of the striving steward’s prayer. 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?

January 1 – Holy Name “*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”?

The 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.

The Feast of the Epiphany – January 6 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.

First Sunday after the Epiphany: The Baptism of our Lord “*You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.*” In our own Baptism, we have been “*marked as Christ’s own forever*”. God is always with us, and we are his beloved children. He longs for us to build a real, holy relationship with him. Part of being a good steward is using the tools of prayer, study, corporate worship and generous giving to move steadily and intentionally toward that holy relationship.

Epiphany 2 Psalm 36 details some of the gifts for which we need to be ever grateful: *“How priceless is your love, O God! Your people take refuge under the shadow of your wings. They feast upon the abundance of your house; you give them drink from the river of your delights. For with you is the well of life, and in your light we see light. Continue your loving kindness to those who know you, and your favor to those who are true of heart. Lord, make us ever true of heart.*

Epiphany 3 *“Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be always acceptable in your sight, O Lord, my strength and my redeemer.”* This familiar phrase from Psalm 19 is perhaps most often used by those giving sermons or homilies, but the words are appropriate for all of us as well as we strive to lead the life of a faithful disciple and steward.

Epiphany 4 1 Corinthians:13 is probably one of the most familiar parts of scripture, especially used at marriage ceremonies. But its description of love’s attributes, and the advice to remember that we see only in part, and will only later be enlightened about the true breadth of God’s love for all of us, is welcome reassurance for those of us who sometimes struggle to stay faithfully on the steward’s path.

Epiphany 5 Isaiah 6:8 ends with the Lord saying: *“Who shall I send, and who will go for us?”* As those wishing to be faithful stewards, will our response be the same as the one in the lesson – *“here am I, send me.”*?

Epiphany 6 The Lord says, *“I the Lord will test the mind and search the heart, to give to all according to their ways, according to the fruit of their doings.”* Are we cultivating the Holy Habits – prayer, study, generous giving, and regular worship and support in our parish community – so that the “fruit of our doings” is a reflection of our ever growing thanksgiving to the Giver of all?

Epiphany 7 Joseph said to his brothers *“Come closer to me”*. And conscientious stewards remember that’s what God says to us daily: *“Come closer to me”*; give me your burdens and your concerns. Rest in me when you are weary, and trust my plans for you and yours. We can take comfort in God’s promise that we don’t have to go it alone.

Epiphany 8 Jesus says,... *“for each tree is known by its own fruit.”* Perhaps we have trouble imagining ourselves as trees, but our prayer, study, giving, service to others, and active participation in a spiritual community can clothe the branches of our lives and help us share the fruits of our holy labors abundantly with others. May our Creator make us strong and visible trees in the gardens where we are planted!

Last Epiphany It is hard to believe that Lent begins this week. Have you considered yet what discipline you might assume for these next weeks? Rather than “giving something up”, what might you “take on” that will help you to grow as a steward and apprentice of Jesus?

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 1 Deuteronomy: 26 is all about “first-fruits giving”. Moses rehearsed all that had happened to the Israelites, and how they were strengthened and preserved, and tells them, *“to set your gifts down before the Lord, [and then...] celebrate with all the bounty the Lord has given to you and to your house.”* Good advice for modern-day stewards as well!

Lent 2 *“So shall your descendants be.”* Just think, you are one of those descendants. Perhaps you sometimes think you are uncountable, as were all the stars Abraham could not number. But we are assured that we are loved and counted by God Himself, who numbers us all as His own. How can we not be full of gratitude for such a special gift?

Lent 3 Hard lessons in these days of Lent...reminders that although we are gifted to be called God’s own, there are expectations. How do the Holy Habits of prayer, study, generous giving, and regular corporate worship help us, in the Lord’s name, to be fruit-bearing rather than barren and unproductive?

Lent 4 *Ambassadors for Christ.* We may smile when we hear that term, but indeed, the dictionary says that ambassador means, among other things, “an authorized representative or messenger”. Through our Baptism, God has made us his representatives and messengers. Faithful stewards take that designation seriously!

Lent 5 “*The Lord has done great things for us, and we are glad indeed.*” We show our gratitude for the many gifts God gives us by learning to know him better through prayer and study, by supporting the work of this parish, the diocese and the world, and by being present at worship, not only to be filled ourselves with His grace and nourishment through the Eucharist, but to offer support and encouragement to others who join us on this journey.

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 Psalm 118 ends “*On this day the Lord has acted; we will rejoice and be glad in it.*” May we strive to be rejoicing stewards not only in the Easter season, but the whole year through – always thankful and grateful for our many blessings. *Alleluia! Alleluia!*

Easter 2 How often are we like Thomas the doubter? What does it take for us to say, “*My Lord and my God*”? Part of the steward’s life is consciously taking time to read the stories in scripture, to be part of a faith community, and through prayer, to create a one on one relationship with our Savior. Hopefully, then, we will be thankful to call ourselves part of the faithful who “*have not seen and yet believe*”.

Easter 3 Psalm 30 ends, “*Therefore my heart sings to you without ceasing; O Lord, my God, I will give you thanks forever.*” And faithful stewards know that giving thanks forever means more than singing. How are you doing with the Holy Habits – prayer, study, worship in community, and generous giving? Cultivating them may make your songs more joyful indeed!

Easter 4 Jesus outlines some promises for those who hear Him and believe. “*My sheep hear my voice. I know them and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish. No one will snatch them out of my hand.*” How can our gratitude and corresponding generosity to God and others not be heightened if we trust those words? What blessed relief to know that our future with God is insured!

Easter 5 Jesus gives a new commandment – “*Love one another. Just as I have loved you, you should also love one another...everyone will know you are my disciples if you love one another.*” How better can we affirm that we are stewards and disciples than by loving God in return, and by using our gratitude and generosity to serve the needs of others?

Easter 6 Psalm 67 says in part: “*The earth has brought forth her increase; may God, our own God give us his blessing.*” And surely we have been blessed with untold riches and blessings; may we covenant to return generously to God and to serve others in his name as a sign of our heartfelt gratitude.

Easter 7 Jesus prays with the Disciples, “*I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word, that they all may be one.*” And guess what? We are some of “those who will believe in me through their word.” Down through the ages, these words have been repeated and reread, and though we certainly are not yet all one, one of the ways we can show our gratitude to our Creator and Redeemer, is to be part of that continuing band of the faithful who are eager to spread the Good News.

The Feast 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 Romans: 5 says in part, “God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.” And a favorite Trinity Sunday hymn sings “All thy works shall praise thy name in earth and sky and sea.” Part of a faithful steward’s life is daily praise and thanks to God for all he has given us. Pray and praise unceasingly!

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 Psalm 92 says in part: “*It is a good thing to give thanks to the Lord, and to sing praises to your Name, O Most High.*” And that’s what a grateful steward strives to do...always and everywhere to give thanks for the multitude of blessings that have been poured upon us.

Proper 4 “*Give us those things which are profitable for us...*” And that does not mean financially profitable (though some of that may be included), but rather those gifts that will guide our souls into a deeper relationship with our Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier....now that’s profitable in a big way!

Proper 5 “*O, God, from whom all good proceeds...*” We need to instill that reminder constantly in our hearts, and consequently, to live our lives in gratitude and service to others as a sign of our thanksgiving to the Lord who sends all blessings.

Proper 6 Having heard the parable about debt forgiveness, Simon says he supposes the one who had the larger debt forgiven will love the master more. And how does that message translate for us? Are we forever grateful for the debt that has been willingly paid for all of us by the sacrifice of our loving Savior? Do we live our lives accordingly?

Proper 7 Jesus heals one of the “least and lost” – one who was feared and had been rejected by those around him. When he wants to join Jesus on his travels, Jesus tells him to “*Return to your home, and tell how much good God has done for you.*” And we are urged to do the same: Live in God’s love for you, and tell others God’s story!

Proper 8 Paul writes “*the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.*” Quite a list for those who wish to be his disciples, stewards, and friends. Do you agree that we all have no shortage of things on which to work?

Proper 9 “*Therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send laborers into his harvest*”...and yes, all of us, even we who are town and city dwellers are called to labor for the Lord’s harvest. After all, he gives us everything we have; can we not work for His kingdom in return? How good it will be to hear the old hymn words, “*And a glad sound comes with the setting sun – servant, well done.*”

Proper 10 The story of the good Samaritan calls being merciful an important attribute of a servant of the Lord. With God’s own examples of abundant mercy shown to all his people (even at their worst) in all times, we have a perfect guide to help us as we try to respond to his blessings with love and mercy of our own.

Proper 11 In today’s world, much is often made of the contrast between Mary and Martha - one who sits at the feet of the Lord to learn, and one who is consumed by the details of providing hospitality. Both, of course, have their places, and as faithful disciples (students and followers) and stewards (caretakers), we need to pray for the guidance and grace to balance the two in ways pleasing to our Provider.

Proper 12 “*Ask and it will be given you; search and you will find; knock and the door will be opened for you.*” The problem with most of us is that our faith is not strong enough to trust wholly in God’s promises. Pray for the grace to confidently expect God’s abundance to be part of your daily life. Be thankful for it...and pass on the good news of your blessings to others!

Proper 13 *“Take care! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of possessions...and the things you have prepared (saved), whose will they be? Extend an open hand with your worldly possessions; it’s so much more fulfilling than a closed fist!*

Proper 14 It’s one of the all-time stewardship favorites this week: Build for yourselves *“an unfailing treasure in heaven...for where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.”* And it’s how we serve, and how we give, and how we love others that adds to that heavenly treasure chest !

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 15 *“to follow daily in the steps of his most blessed life...”* The Holy Habits of daily prayer and study, giving, corporate worship, and serving others can be good reminders of the disciple’s (yes, you are, or can be one!) daily quest for ways in which to serve the God who gives all.

Proper 16 *“Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us give thanks, by which we offer to God an acceptable worship with reverence and awe...”* The world may often be topsy-turvy, and our lives in turmoil, but the bottom line for believers is that God’s kingdom cannot be shaken...we are safe if we commit ourselves to His protection.

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/replace as you need/choose to.

“A suggestion for this Labor Day weekend: As a way of always being 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 17 *“Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels unaware.”* Blessed are those who make service to others an ingrained part of their stewardship lives. “Pay it forward” and “pass it on” are current mantras for some in our society. We have been so blessed by our Creator that these reminders should be welcome and, yes, sought out tasks for us.

Proper 18 Psalm 139 begins *“Lord, you have searched me out and known me; you know my sitting down and my rising up; you discern my thoughts from afar.”* Even for those (or perhaps, especially for those) trying to be faithful stewards, God’s discerning our thoughts from afar has to give us pause. How can we possibly keep our minds thinking and acting in the way God would have us respond to life? It’s the old Holy Habits again which can help to keep us on the path. How are you doing with prayer, study, service to others, giving, and being faithful in community worship and activity?

Proper 19 Today’s Epistle talks about saving sinners and showing great mercy. Timothy says that we are saved in order that we might gratefully tell of God’s mercy by the example of our new lives in Jesus Christ. Does your prayer, giving, worship and service make you *“an example to those who would come to believe in Him to gain eternal life?”*

Proper 20 *“do not be anxious about earthly things, but love things heavenly”,* so that even in our daily lives, when all around us may continue to change, create problems and worries, or even fade away, we can, with faith, put our trust in God and those things He promises us shall endure forever.

Proper 21 What a difference it would have made for Lazarus if the rich man, had showed him even an iota of the mercy and favor God had modeled for him in his pampered life. But the scales are eventually balanced, and Lazarus finds a lasting home near God, while the rich man is condemned to suffer for eternity. How often do we question why “bad things happen to good people”, but take little comfort in God’s promise to balance the scales gloriously in His good time? Must be because we’re human and can never know the many mysteries of God...we just have to trust...and how hard and unsatisfying that can be!

Proper 22 “...*you are always more ready to hear than we to pray, and to give more than we either desire or deserve...*”. A favorite stewardship saying is “you cannot out give God!” Go ahead, trust this adage and put Him to the test. See what happens when you give back sacrificially and with thanksgiving; the results may surprise you!

Proper 23 In the story of the two lepers, only one returns to Jesus to give thanks for his healing. Are we often like the other? Do we accept God’s many blessings and gifts, but fail to respond in a sufficiently grateful way? The use of our treasure, time, and talent for the Lord’s work is a good indicator of our gratitude to our God who gives all.

Proper 24 The final verse of Psalm 121 says “...*The Lord shall watch over your going out and your coming in, from this time forth for evermore.*” How can we possibly respond to such a boundless promise with anything less than expansive and whole-hearted gratitude, generosity and service?

Proper 25 We pray that God may “...*increase in us the gifts of faith, hope, and charity...*” Cultivating the Holy Habits of prayer, study, being part of a worshipping community, and generous giving can be important steps on the path of our daily journey to grow nearer to God.

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 Jesus says “*For the Son of man came to seek out and to save the lost.*” We are reminded that all of us could at one time or another be counted among the lost. And we cannot be “found” by our own merit. God looks for us always. As some of the parables tell us, he will search far and long to bring us into a renewed relationship. If God seems far away, perhaps we need to assist the search by intentionally responding to that continual, loving call.

Proper 27 In this time around Veteran’s Day, let us remember all who have served (or now serve) in our country’s Armed Forces: “*O Judge of the nations, we remember before you with grateful hearts the men and women of our country who in days of decision ventured much for the liberties we now enjoy...*” (BCP, p. 830). May part of our faith journeys be the willingness to pursue peace, and to work for the Kingdom day when the sacrifices of war no longer need to be made.

Proper 28 “*Brothers and sisters, do not weary in doing what is right.* As disciples and stewards “in training”, part of what is right for us is loving God with all our hearts, minds and souls, and continually striving to frequently and generously thank Him for every good gift we have been given...and they have been many!

The Last Sunday after Pentecost God gave a most painful and extravagant gift to us – the Crucifixion of His beloved Son that we might be saved from everlasting death and granted eternal life. How can we possibly adequately respond to that overwhelming love for us? Why not try loving Him and our neighbors, and living a generous and thankful life? It’s a good start!