

## **God's Stewards: Re-created at the Core of Our Being**

2<sup>nd</sup> Sun. after Epiphany (PWAP #1) – 01/18/26

Mt. Calvary Luth. – Pastor Keith Besel

Texts: Is. 43:1-3a, 2 Cor. 5:14-21, Lk. 19:1-10

### **Introduction**

⌘ Today we begin our three-part journey of sermon messages and Bible Studies intended to focus the attention of our hearts, minds and souls upon who you and I are at the core of our earthly/human nature as well as whom our God and Savior has now re-created and made us to be at our core within His body of believers as His *People With A Purpose*.

➔ Yes, this concept and set of teachings are often called “Christian stewardship”; a topic that commonly brings utter fear and horror at the very mention of the word; so much so that some of you here may even cringe at it and resolve to say, “Well, you won’t see me here for the next two weeks.”

➔ But friends, if this concept of Christian stewardship conjures up any kind of negative feelings or revulsion, please; please listen at least to these next words with an open mind. I say this in all sincerity and with the deepest love possible, “To view Christian stewardship in a negative light only means that you are not yet understanding this Biblical teaching from God correctly; that something or someone or you yourself have somehow turned what our Lord intends you to receive and cherish as a precious gift and a joy-filled treasure into the exact opposite.”

⌘ So, if this is you, even in the slightest, please – for the sake of Jesus Himself, purge those negative thoughts and understandings from your hearts at this time, so that, on the basis of God’s Holy Word and by the gracious work of His Holy Spirit, today and for the next two Sundays, you might hear and understand how God Himself has re-created you, at your core; and woven into your very existence as His *People With A Purpose* the priceless honor of a new life that cannot be matched by anything else on earth; a life that is filled now with purpose and is lived each day to the glory of God Himself!

➔ Just so that we are able to move forward on the same set of tracks in this *People With A Purpose* journey, let’s make sure that we are operating, not with a worldly view and definition of “stewardship”, but with one that is founded in and defined by Holy Scripture itself. To that end in fact, our church body, The Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod, has studied and developed a Biblical definition. It says that Christian stewardship is “the free and joyous activity of the child of God and God’s family, the church, in managing all of life and life’s resources for God’s purposes.”

⌘ And the first of eight Biblical principles of stewardship – which is going to be the core of what we consider today is this; that God’s Stewards Are God’s Stewards.

➔ Now I know, that sounds like it’s just repeating itself, but this is a crucial point that all of us must understand and entirely embrace in faith, because it is the foundation of this entire concept. The point is that we are not our own or anyone else’s stewards in this earthly life. God created all things, including each one of us out of the very substance of this earth. As Psalm 139 says, God alone “knitted [us] together in [our] mother’s womb” (v.13). And so we are not our own, but we have been “bought with a price” 1 Corinthians 6:19-20 says. We have been personally redeemed from sin, death and Satan by the innocent blood of Jesus and given a new life to live now. That means we are God’s precious people. So, as St. Francis of Assisi said long ago, stewardship is “Everything I do after I say, ‘I believe.’”

### **I. Apart from Christ, we are naturally self-centered.**

⌘ But first, each one of us must come to grips with the reality of who we are in our inherited sinful nature. The deepest and most pervasive characteristic we all still display is that we are self-centered. Martin Luther had a Latin expression for this. He said that we have a *cor incurvatus in se*. In English that means, “the heart turned in on itself.”

➔ This is such an apt description, isn’t it? Because whether we are talking about ourselves or anyone else, in our sin-filled nature, we naturally think of our bodies; our lives; our world; our personal resources; and all other things in this world with ourselves at the center of it all. Even what we do or don’t do for others is infected by and smudged with sin.

⌘ We’re all like the husband whose wife comes out to him while he’s working in the garage with hands that are covered with dirt and grease and she tells him that she’s going out shopping for a while. So he gets the idea that he will surprise her by doing something really nice for her while she’s away. So he goes inside the house and straightens up the lamp shades and pillows on the couch; folds some laundry; and replaces the towels in the bathroom with clean ones from the dryer.

➔ When she gets home, she is astounded … and she is super angry. Why? Well, he never washed his hands. So, all of his loving work; everything he had touched, was now stained with dirt and grease.

⌘ That’s the way that our deep-seated, self-centered sin influences our thinking and approach to being God’s stewards in life. The honest fact of the matter is this: we don’t want to be God’s stewards - even those of you that are trying to convince yourselves right now that you do.

➔ Everyone has said or thought something like this before: “I’m tired, I really don’t want to go to that meeting or that activity at church today, or tonight.” “I’d much rather just stay home and watch the game.” “I really need to get X or Y done instead of helping that neighbor across the street or visiting that lonely shut-in from church or helping out with the Altar Guild or sprucing up the dingy windows or walls at church.” Or, “I’ve served on that board or in this position for more than my share of years. It’s about time someone else did something around here so that I can just relax; so that they can take care of things instead of me for once” Or, “I think it’s great that Sally and Jim are reaching out into our community to share about Jesus and trying to meet new people, but I don’t feel comfortable doing that kind of thing. I’d rather just kind of keep my faith to myself.”

How do I know those kinds of things have bounced around in your heads before? because I am a self-centered sinner just like the rest of you. But understand this, my dear Christians, when you and I think that way, we don’t want to be God’s stewards! Instead we want to remain Satan’s stewards and keep our lives stained with selfishness. This is why James 3:16 says, “Where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice.” And 1 Corinthians 10:24, “Let no one seek his own good, but the good of his neighbor.”

⌘ You and I, as Christians, are not as William Henley, the poet says in his poem named *Invictus* where he said, “I am the master of my fate, I am the captain of my soul.”

➔ No, you and I as believers in Christ are not about, and we do not live just for ourselves anymore.

## II. God is Creator of all things & our Redeemer.

⌘ But God has brought us into an intimate, dependent relationship with Him, and He has gifted us with the privilege and the honor of being His very own stewards, trustees; caretakers of all that He created...for Him!

➔ After all, Gen 1:1 says, “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth”, not us! And since God created all things, He’s the one who owns all things.

- ⌘ Our Old Testament Reading today confirms that God not only created us to be His people, but that He “redeemed” us (Is. 43:1) from our sinful human nature. He tells us straight out, “Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine. ... For I am Yahweh your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior” (Is. 43:1, 3).

### **III. In Christ, we are His new creation - stewards.**

- ⌘ Indeed, God, in His grace and mercy, by Jesus’ death on the cross, has saved us all from the eternal condemnation that we all deserve because of our self-centered, self-fulfilling ways.

→ And not only has He saved us, but He has changed who you and I are now at the very core of our being. Paul explains it to us in Romans 6:4 when he says, “We were buried therefore with [Jesus] by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.” Did you hear that? He has given you and me a new life! A life now where our entire perspective on all the things of this life has been re-created; changed from being curved in on ourselves to where we do actually care about others; where we actually want to be about God’s mission and purpose and desire for us and our activities before ourselves and our selfish wants and desires.

- ⌘ Paul tells us in our Epistle Reading this morning, “the love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that One has died for all, therefore all have died; and He died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for Him who for their sake died and was raised. ... Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come” (2 Cor. 5:14–15, 17).

→ And what’s new at the core of our being is that we actually look forward to and we want to serve the One who died for us; here in His Church or over there at our neighbor’s house or out around the community where people do not know or love Jesus yet. Yes, I said it. Now, as God’s stewards, a church meeting where we make plans for how we can *Share God’s Word* and *Serve All People* is a pleasurable activity now because we are focusing our lives upon our Savior and Redeemer from sin.

- ⌘ You see, living as God’s People With A Purpose is directly connected to our very salvation. It is the natural result of God’s love for us. Ephesians 2:8-10 tells us this: “For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.”

→ Martin Luther teaches us this same thing in his explanation of the Second Article of the Apostles’ Creed:

I believe that Jesus Christ, true God, begotten of the Father from eternity, and also true man, born of the Virgin Mary, is my Lord, who has redeemed me, a lost and condemned person, purchased and won me from all sins, from death, and from the power of the devil; not with gold or silver, but with His holy, precious blood and with His innocent suffering and death, that I may be His own and live under Him in His kingdom and serve Him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness, just as He is risen from the dead, lives and reigns to all eternity. This is most certainly true.

- ⌘ So how is it, my friends that you and I are responding to God’s undeserved kindness and love? How much has it actually changed your life after He saved you from the eternal condemnation and punishment that you deserve because of your sin? Shouldn’t we all be filled to overflowing with joy at this truth? Shouldn’t we be jittery with eagerness to express our gratitude toward Jesus?

→ I mean, I think we all would agree that the Lord didn't save us just so that we will continue living only for ourselves, did He? No, He became one of us; He suffered, died and rose again, not only to save us from something, but even more to save us for something. And that something is so that we can now live, re-created for an intimate life with Him; a life that is filled with purpose; the purpose of doing His good works; the works which God has prepared for us to do as His esteemed stewards!

→ Yes, we get to manage, on His behalf, all of life and life's resources for His purpose. That means that everything that He has given to us, from our time, to our material things, to our finances and this flesh and blood; all of it is His gift for us to use in service to Him!

### **Conclusion**

\* So whether you are in church, at work, at school, at home with your family, out in the community, or traveling about; whatever you are doing and wherever you are, remember that you are God's stewards: re-created at the core of your being, according to His will, as a natural result of His unsurpassed love for you!

→ This, my dear people, is who you and I are as God's *People With A Purpose* today and always. Amen.