



From the Pulpit: October 30, 2022
Reformation Sunday

The Reverend William A. Evertsberg

I Peter 4:7–11

Stewardship³, I: Family

Creator of all that has been, is, and will be, you are the God that sees us and sustains us. How can we ever thank you for all you have granted us? Our very lives, created in your image: Thank you for the capacity and privilege of giving. May these gifts turn hunger into food, literacy into education, thirst into water, disease into healing, and displacement into welcome. We humbly ask you to consecrate these gifts for the transformation of lives and communities, so that our abundance may be for their need, and their need become our abundance. Amen.

The end of all things is near; therefore be serious and discipline yourselves for the sake of your prayers. Above all, maintain constant love for one another, for love covers a multitude of sins. Be hospitable to one another without complaining. Like good stewards of the manifold grace of God, serve one another with whatever gift each of you has received. Whoever speaks must do so as one speaking the very words of God; whoever serves must do so with the strength that God supplies, so that God may be glorified in all things through Jesus Christ. To him belong the glory and the power forever and ever. Amen.

“If we take care of all three—faith family, neighbor, and spiritual home—we are practicing Stewardship to the Third Power, and our impact will increase not arithmetically, but exponentially.”

A couple of years ago, I mentioned that one Bible scholar explained Stewardship by referring to *Downton Abbey*. That is to say we are not Lord Robert Crawley, seventh Earl of Grantham, or Lady Cora Crawley, or even Dowager Countess Maggie Smith. We are Mr. Carson, the butler, the manager of the estate. We are Elsie Hughes, who keeps the house for the Lord, Lord Robert.¹ You see how nicely the metaphor works, right? Lord Robert is God; we work for him. Lady Cora is God; we work for her.

In every local congregation, God entrusts its members with three good things: (1) Our Faith Family; (2) Our Neighbor; and (3) Our Home, our building, our campus.

We take care of our faith family with the Annual Operating Budget; we’re hoping for \$2.3 million this year. That pays me and 16 other employees, and keeps the lights on, the shrubs trimmed, and the organ humming.

We take care of our **neighbor** with the Outreach Budget; that goal for this year is \$500,000. And we take care of our **home** through a Capital Campaign; who knows how much that’s going to cost? You will decide.

This fall I want to preach a sermon series called *Stewardship Cubed*, or *Stewardship to the Third Power*. To be a good steward is to care for the good things God has entrusted to you.

¹ Adam Copeland, ed., *Beyond the Offering Plate: A Holistic Approach to Stewardship* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2017), p. xv.

The most important of the three is the first: our Faith Family, the Operating Budget. If you have to choose just one of the three, choose that one, because without the Annual Budget, the other two don't exist.

If we take care of all three—faith family, neighbor, and spiritual home—we are practicing *Stewardship to the Third Power*, and our impact will increase not arithmetically, but exponentially.

God asks for a tithe—10%. I hope that's a floor, not a ceiling. That includes all your charitable giving. You are not just stewards of Kenilworth Union Church, but of Northwestern or Michigan or whatever your alma mater is, the Art Museum, the Orchestra, and Refugee One. Among those worthy beneficiaries of your largesse, we hope your gift to the church is one of your larger contributions.

The median household income in the villages our members come from is over \$220,000, or three times the national median. Our congregation is probably an accurate microcosm of those villages. Some of you are way below that figure, and some of you are way above that figure—that's what 'median' means. I know where I am relative to the rest of us. You know where you are. If we all gave 3% of our household income to the church, we could accomplish everything the Board of Trustees feels God is calling us to do.

We're almost there already. Do you know what is the average gift to the church? It's over \$3,900. That's really, really good. Thanks, and Thanks, and Ever Thanks. Collectively, could you push it over \$4,000?

Look I am not an unbiased proponent of generous charity. I live thereby. I am sheltered thereby. But I say these things not just because the **Church** needs your generosity, but because **you** need your generosity too. It is in our giving that we discover the very point and purpose of our lives.

You know that old quip from Winston Churchill: We make a **living** from what we **get**, but we make a **life** from what we **give**.

Ralph Waldo Emerson said, "When half-gods go, the gods arrive." Yes? When half-gods go, the gods arrive. You see what he means, right? When we set aside the semi-deities and demi-gods that clamor for our allegiance, the real Creator of the all the stars and worlds becomes the center of our existence.

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A guy walked into a Best Buy to buy a computer for his son, and he asked the salesclerk: "Do you honor credit cards?" The clerk suddenly got reverent and said, "**Honor** them! We **worship** them!"² Yes?

When God slinks away from an indifferent world, other sparkly attractions rush in to fill the vacuum.

The world keeps trying to convince us that if we acquire what the world is selling, we will be happy and fulfilled. Material goods, says the world, slake spiritual thirsts. The advertisements can get quite extravagant.

One ad says, "All computers have a brain. Ours has a soul." Royal Caribbean Cruise Lines gives us a picture of the Buddha with the tag line: "It can take several lifetimes to reach a state of peace and tranquility. Or ten days on one of our ships."

A wristwatch company features a woman speaking to a man, "Wow, I can see by your watch that you're really successful." "Yes," he says, "this watch really makes a statement. It says I'm self-assured." The first time I heard it, I thought it was a parody of bad advertising, but no, it was real.

² Adapted from Bob Patton, *The Reader's Digest*, October, 1996, p. 86.

This all makes the phrase “truth in advertising” an oxymoron, so much so that we’re shocked to see an honest ad. A long time ago, Mazda advertised one of its cars by saying, “This car will not make you more handsome, increase your I.Q., get you a better job, take you to new worlds, or help you meet women. It’s a **car**, for God’s sake, not a **miracle**. It’s 2,000 pounds of steel, rubber, and plastic. It gets good gas mileage; it costs only \$24,000; and it won’t break down after 15,000 miles. If you think this is a good deal, come and see us.”

On a magazine page empty except for a picture of a small red VW Beetle, Volkswagen says, “Roundest car on earth.” That’s truth in advertising. I haven’t seen any ads like that in a while. I guess they didn’t work.

Emerson said, “When half-gods go, the gods arrive. C.S. Lewis modifies Mr. Emerson’s idea just slightly. Dr. Lewis says, “When God arrives, the half-gods can remain.”³

That is to say when God is firmly enthroned at the center of our existence, all of God’s good gifts assume their proper place in our lives. They become then what they are—**goods**, not **gods**.

In a circular letter to all the churches of Asia, an author writing under the name and apostolic authority of St. Peter, the First Pope writes, “The end of all things is near. Therefore, be serious and discipline yourselves.”

“The end of all things is near,” he said. He was wrong about that. We’ve been saying “The end is near” for 2,000 years and so far we’ve been wrong.

But the early church operated with what scholars call “an intense expectation of an imminent end.” We’ve been wrong about that, but one of these days, we will be right. And we will want to have achieved the very plan and purpose of our lives.

“Serve one another.
If you are smart,
share your wisdom
with us. If you are
retired, share your
time. If you are rich,
give a generous gift
to the church.”

We yearn for “a higher life than we fell asleep from,”⁴ to use the words of Henry David Thoreau. Says Peter, “Like good stewards of the manifold grace of God, serve one another with whatever gifts you have received.”

Serve one another. If you are smart, share your wisdom with us. If you are retired, share your time. If you are rich, give a generous gift to the church.

Because we have experienced the extravagant multiplicity of God’s free grace, of God’s unnumbered benedictions. Serve one another, so that God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To him belong the glory and the power forever and ever.

³ C.S. Lewis, *The Four Loves* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1960), p. 119.

⁴ Henry David Thoreau, *Walden*, in *The American Tradition in Literature*, eds. George and Barbara Perkins (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1994, *Walden* first published 1854), p. 1316.

—Prayers of the People—
The Reverend Katie Snipes Lancaster

We have felt your nudge all week long: in the struggle of this week's work, in the long spaces between rest, in the intensity of family life, in the upturned palms, waiting, questioning, searching for a way through. You have been there amid all this and more, your presence forging a path toward hope, your nearness giving strength, the beauty of your creation crying out as witness to your deep love for us and the world. Hold us in the ungraspable tug of life, the ebb and flow of the everyday, where your unending song can be heard.

In our personal lives, and across the wide expanse of global trouble, hold us in our grief, God. Let us receive the gift of love through this heartache, let us see the vast beauty of the night sky and feel less alone in the fabric of this life. Let us wear the garments of sorrow gently, so that we are held but not weighed down.

On the wide boulevard of life, let us practice gratitude: first for the autumn air, the deep purple, golden yellow, fire orange leaves falling to the ground, and then the knobby twigs strewn about after the wind. For the gift of family, their attentiveness to the task of being together, their genuine acts of love, their self-sacrifice, their

transparent care. For the mystery of employment, the daily tasks that feel at once mundane and monumental, the way we spend our days becoming the way we live our lives. And for the child-like delight of tomorrow's holiday, the possibility of joy, laughter, and delight as we say "trick or treat" to one another. Let there be safety among the sweets, as we go door to door.

God, our hearts are turned toward you. Continue to carry us, hold us, care for us, letting your presence known as we pray the prayer you teach us saying, Our Father.... Amen.

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