

Sunday Sermonettes: February 4, 2018

An old saying says, “Don’t forget to stop and smell the roses.” How many of us actually take the time to marvel at all the amazing things that God has given to us? I don’t find myself stopping to admire the roses, I find myself acting more like Robert Frost, “And miles to go before I sleep, and miles to go before I sleep.”

As we walk through this life it is very easy to focus on our own selves and to miss all the many blessings that God has given. As we walk through our Stewardship Sundays this year we will take a moment to look at the blessings of Time, Talents and Treasures that Jesus has given. This morning we will look at all the tools that God has put at our disposal to live in this world and to complete our mission of sharing the Gospel.

We will marvel at the many blessings at our fingertips and we will thank God for them.

Sermonette # 1: God Gives us the Earth and All That is in it

Reading: Genesis 1: 26, 28-31

When I was little, my family used to take trips across the country. There was the trip to the east coast and then the next year the trip to the west coast. There was a lot about these trips that I liked, but there were other parts of the trip that I didn’t really like. It seemed like my parents wanted to stop at every scenic outlook and turn-off along the way.

It was frustrating for me because I thought the scenic outlooks looked about the same. This turn-out had mountains just like the last 2 did. I realize something now that I didn’t realize then. All of this scenery, all of this earth, God put here for me.

Maybe you have never thought about the earth as yours, but God does. When God created Adam and Eve, he made man as the crown of his creation. He gave man abilities and talents that were completely different from the animals and he gave him a very special gift and responsibility: this Earth and all that is on it.

God did not create a universe that has eclipses and shooting stars for animals, he created that for people to marvel at. God did not create the world so that it could rule over man with global warming, some sort of invasive plant that overtakes civilization, or an uprising of the animals, God created people so that they could rule over the earth and all that he had created in it.

When we think of our blessings, we often count the ones that are close to home. We may count our family, our wealth, our things, and our health. We do this because we are thinking too small. God has given us all of these other blessings too. They are no less important and amazing for us today than when Adam first saw them.

God not only provides for us through the rolling fields, the waters from the mountains and the bounties of the orchards and groves, he does so in a way that is beautiful and breathtaking. Our lives would be fine without natural wonders, but think of the beauty of God’s creation we would miss if there was no Grand Canyon, Yellowstone, mountain views, desert vistas, ocean views, or water falls.

All of this nature is amazing and beautiful, but it is not the greatest of the blessings that God has given. Without the blessing of a Savior, we might as well have a planet that is as flat as a pancake with no mountains or valleys. We might as well have only one type of food that is bland, we might as well live as mindless robots. Without a Savior there is no need for a beautiful world to enjoy, because the ending would be the same for all of us: hell.

Yet, God has cared about you, body and soul. He has provided for all your needs. When your soul is overwhelmed with sin and you call out for forgiveness, he gives forgiveness and healing through Jesus. He provides the hope and glory of heaven when sickness fills our life and we are full of doubts and fears.

God points at his love for your soul, a love that sent him to the cross to die for you, as reason to take hope in this life and know that he will provide and take care of you.

When we look at all God has given to us we should marvel at these great gifts. Whether we stop at every turn off and enjoy these things is not the question. Having hearts which praise and thank our God for these gifts of body and of soul really is.

Genesis 1: 26, 28-31

²⁶ Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground."

²⁸ God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground."

²⁹ Then God said, "I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food. ³⁰ And to all the beasts of the earth and all the birds of the air and all the creatures that move on the ground—everything that has the breath of life in it—I give every green plant for food." And it was so.

³¹ God saw all that he had made, and it was very good. And there was evening, and there was morning—the sixth day.

Thank you Lord for the amazing earth that you give which sustains me. Help me to have a heart of thanks for all that you give to sustain me and bring beauty to my life. Amen

Sermonette # 2: These are Not Mine, but His.

Reading #2: Psalm 24: 1-6

God has given all of this earth, all of these blessings to us to use. He daily continues to give us every gift we need. From our first day to our last he gives us life. From our first breath he gives us abilities and talents to make use of in the work place and enjoy for our own amusement and hobbies. He gives us a new day of health to wake up and use the gifts he has given to us. He allows us to use those gifts to make money to provide for ourselves to buy ourselves things, but even this money and these things come from the Lord's gracious hand.

How do we view these gracious blessings? One of the things that is most frustrating for a parent is when they give a gift and the child is selfish about it almost immediately. Whether it is a new camera, a video game, a remote controlled something or other, or some other trinket, as soon as a brother or sister, or even a mother or a father asks to use it, the call goes out, "Heh, Stop it!! That's Mine!!" Instead of being thankful that they have something they can share with a loved one, they are immediately possessive and selfish. It almost defeats the purpose of the gift.

We can't get too upset with our children because this is the same attitude that we model with the gifts that God gives. What happened the last time God cut back a gift even a little bit? Maybe the check didn't stretch as far, maybe the car needed to be repaired, maybe the salary wasn't increased this year, maybe we weren't quite as healthy as we wanted to be, what was our response?

We did not respond with, "The earth is the Lord's and everything in it." We did not respond with, "I will trust in the Lord." We responded with anger, fear, worry and doubt, "These are MY gifts, it is not fair that they are taken away." All we are concerned about is ourselves and getting the things we feel we deserve.

David directs us to lift our eyes from ourselves and to place them right where they deserve to be: On God. These gifts are not mine to use as I want to, they are gifts that God has entrusted to my care for use while I am here on the earth.

What will happen to the time that God gave you when you pass away? It will be gone. What will happen to the blessings and talents that you have been given when you pass away? They will be gone. What will happen to your job when you pass away? It will go to another. What will happen to your money when you go away? It will go to another.

God entrusts these things, these gifts, into our care with the knowledge that we are only using them for a short time. They do not belong to us, they are his.

Reading # 2: Psalm 24: 1-6

¹ The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it; ² for he founded it upon the seas and established it upon the waters. ³ Who may ascend the hill of the Lord? Who may stand in his holy place? ⁴ He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not lift up his soul to an idol or swear by what is false. ⁵

He will receive blessing from the Lord and vindication from God his Savior. ⁶ Such is the generation of those who seek him, who seek your face, O God of Jacob.

Oh Lord help to look upon the things I have as gifts from you. Help me to trust in the giver more than the gift Amen.

Sermonette # 3: God gives us the Tools to use to Bring People His Love

Reading # 3: Luke 16:1-13

God gives you and me the Earth and everything in it. These great gifts that he gives to us provide us with all we need to live this life. But these things are not really our own, they are God's that he entrusts to us for a short time. We are managers of all what God gives. Stewardship is the God-pleasing management of all the things that God places into our care. We usually place all that God gives into three categories: Time, Talents and Treasures.

We can't be good stewards until we understand our first 2 sermonettes for this morning. We can't be good managers until we understand the depth of love that God has for us that he would provide and support us with all these things, and that all these things are God's gift to us to manage.

Once we understand the giver and the blessing, then we can understand how to be good stewards and to thank our God for his goodness. Then we can begin to answer the question, "Why did God give me these things and what does he want me to do with them?"

Our answer to those two questions comes from arguably one of the most difficult parables to understand. It is printed for you in the service folder.

Reading # 3. Luke 16:1-13

Jesus told his disciples: "There was a rich man whose manager was accused of wasting his possessions. ² So he called him in and asked him, 'What is this I hear about you? Give an account of your management, because you cannot be manager any longer.'

³ "The manager said to himself, 'What shall I do now? My master is taking away my job. I'm not strong enough to dig, and I'm ashamed to beg— ⁴ I know what I'll do so that, when I lose my job here, people will welcome me into their houses.'

⁵ "So he called in each one of his master's debtors. He asked the first, 'How much do you owe my master?'

⁶ " 'Eight hundred gallons of olive oil,' he replied.

"The manager told him, 'Take your bill, sit down quickly, and make it four hundred.'

⁷ "Then he asked the second, 'And how much do you owe?'

" 'A thousand bushels of wheat,' he replied.

"He told him, 'Take your bill and make it eight hundred.'

⁸ "The master commended the dishonest manager because he had acted shrewdly. For the people of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own kind than are the people of the light. ⁹ I tell you, use worldly wealth to gain friends for yourselves, so that when it is gone, you will be welcomed into eternal dwellings.

¹⁰ "Whoever can be trusted with very little can also be trusted with much, and whoever is dishonest with very little will also be dishonest with much. ¹¹ So if you have not been trustworthy in handling worldly wealth, who will trust you with true riches? ¹² And if you have not been trustworthy with someone else's property, who will give you property of your own?

¹³ "No servant can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other.

What is Jesus saying? Is he commending someone who looks like they are stealing? The key to almost every parable is to find the one lesson that Jesus is illustrating.

In this parable, the man thought out of the box. Instead of putting the money in his own bank account, he used the tool at his disposal, his position of authority as a manager, in a way that would benefit those around and him and eventually himself.

The key to this parable is the phrase, "Use worldly wealth to gain friends for yourselves, so that when it is gone, you will be welcomed into eternal dwellings.

Let's apply our two questions from before to Jesus phrase. Why does God give us gifts? God doesn't give us gifts to hoard for ourselves or to use only on ourselves. He gives us gifts to benefit others. What does God want me to use them for? He wants us to use those gifts that he gives in order to share the Word with others so that that Word will benefit others.

It might be easier if we talk less about the gifts God gives us to use and more about the tools that he gives us to use. All that God gives are merely tools to spread his saving world to many more people.

God gives us the earth and all that is in to help us to make it through this life, but it is also a tool to show people how amazing and wise and powerful our God is.

The talents we have are not our own, they are tools we are to use to bring God's glory to bring people in our own amazing and unique way.

Our time is not our own, it is a tool that should bring God glory as we use it to grow in our faith and knowledge of him and to help our friends and neighbors also grow in that faith and knowledge as well.

Everything is God's tool, even that shovel that we lent to our neighbor is a tool by which we have an opportunity to ask about and share Christ.

God gives us his gifts, not just to use on or for ourselves to make sure we are financially, physically, or emotionally stable. God gives us these tools so that we can use them to share the Gospel with other people.

When our focus is on thanking God by the way we use the tools he has given us to share his Word, they we are starting to understand what a thankful heart is all about and what Christian Stewardship is about.

Lord help me to view the gifts you give, not as my own, but as tools that you give for a purpose. Help to use all of those gifts to live my life thanking you and sharing the Gospel with others. Amen