

September 11, 2016
Stewardship is a Choice
#1. Re-Covenanting as God's Managers
Scripture: James 2:14-26 & Matthew 6:19-21, 24

In the New Testament, Christians are called by different names. We are children of God. Servants of God. A chosen people. Friends of Jesus. Followers of the Way. Disciples. Brothers and Sisters. We're even called Saints. We bear all these names proudly.

But on this Re-Covenanting Sunday, I want to talk about one particular name. It's the name "manager". It's a name we don't often call ourselves as Christians. Manager. Or you may be more familiar with the term that's used in older translations of the Bible, where the Greek word *Oikonomos* is translated as "steward."

First Peter 4:10 (NLT) says this:

Each one, as a good "oikonomos" (manager or steward) of God's different gifts, must use for the good of others the special gift he (or she) has received from God.

The word we use in Christian circles that arises from that verse is the word "*Stewardship*". Stewardship is about caring for, or being responsible for, or managing, someone else's property.

Here's what we believe as Presbyterians. This is the Presbyterian Church's confession of faith called, "*Living Faith*".

***Though life is a gift from God,
human life depends on the created world.***

***Our care for the world must reflect God's care.
We are not owners,
but stewards of God's good earth.***

It is because we are stewards, or managers, of God's creation, that we should be concerned as Christians about such things as, the Environment. Global warming. Pollution. Water conservation. Poverty. Injustice. The Distribution of Wealth. Hunger and the Refugee Crisis, to name just a few of the great issues of our day.

As the New Testament writer James, the brother of Jesus, put it, (2:14-17 NLT)

14 What good is it, dear brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but don't show it by your actions? Can that kind of

faith save anyone? 15 Suppose you see a brother or sister who has no food or clothing, 16 and you say, "Good-bye and have a good day; stay warm and eat well"—but then you don't give that person any food or clothing. What good does that do?

17 So you see, faith by itself isn't enough. Unless it produces good deeds, it is dead and useless.

Isn't that the primary reason why we, as a congregation, support the Newmarket Food Pantry; stand with the residents of Botsford House through our Boarding Home ministry; prepare meals for the Inn from the Cold clients; support the food security programs of the Canadian Food Grains Bank through our Loaves and Fishes project; collect toiletries and socks and clothing for the Evangel Hall Mission in Toronto as it meets the needs of the homeless and the socially isolated?

Isn't that why we are generous in support of Presbyterians Sharing and Presbyterian World Service and Development as they forward God's mission across Canada and around the world? Isn't that why our Vacation Bible Camp raised funds this summer to buy food for people in drought-stricken Ethiopia?

Now we may call these things our "ministries" or "programs" or "mission" projects, but they are much more than that. They are an expression of our commitment to be good stewards or managers of the treasures, time and talents God has given us. This is what stewardship is all about. Being good managers of the resources God has given us to make a difference in the world for Him. This is one way we honor God.

This is also true of our involvement in our communal life as a congregation. God has given every one of us natural talents, abilities and spiritual gifts so that we can use them to bless the lives of other people both, those within our congregation; and those within our community.

The best definition of stewardship I have ever heard is this

"Stewardship is what we DO after we SAY "I believe"

"Stewardship is what we DO after we SAY "I believe" Stewardship is when we recognize that we actually own nothing. God is the owner. We are simply managers or stewards of God's good creation.

It doesn't matter how much you have been given, or how little. The basis of stewardship is that it all belongs to God. Your time, your talents, your abilities, your treasures; God owns them all. Our task is really quite simple.

We are to manage our treasures, and our talents, and our time, as well as we can, and we are to use them to God's glory. The question is never, "What do you have?" It's always, "What are you doing with what you have?"

Think about the offering you brought today and placed in the offering plate. Your money already belongs to God. Not just what you put in the offering plate today. But all of it. What you have in your purse and in your wallet. What you have in your bank account, and in your stock portfolio and in your RRSP's and in your pension plan. Your house, your car, your cottage, your boat, and according to the Psalmist **"the cattle on a thousand hills"** (Psalm 50:10 NLT) – all belong to God.

ALL of your talents, gifts and abilities, not just the ones you use as part of this congregation, belong to God. Even your family belongs to God. Psalm 127:3 (NLT) reminds us:

"Children are a gift from the Lord; they are a reward from him."

Do you remember Job in the Old Testament? He was a wealthy man but through a series of tragic events he lost his wealth and all of his family. Only he and his wife survived. But Job understood this principle of stewardship and so he says this (Job 1:21 GNB):

"I was born with nothing, and I will die with nothing"

Isn't that true for all of us? We entered the world with nothing. We can amass a fortune during our life. We can become billionaires with vast business enterprises, homes, cars, priceless antiques. We can be the most gifted author, artist, or public speaker? We can be a Queen or a commoner. But guess what? We will all die with nothing because we can't take our money, property or position with us. No wonder Jesus said to us (Matthew 6:19-20 NLT)

19 "Don't store up treasures here on earth, where moths eat them and rust destroys them, and where thieves break in and steal. 20 Store your treasures in heaven, where moths and rust cannot destroy, and thieves do not break in and steal."

Listen to Job again (Job 1:21 GNB):

"I was born with nothing, and I will die with nothing. The Lord gave, and now he has taken away. May his name be praised!"

Here are some questions to ask yourself.

If God is the owner of everything I have, and I am a manager of his gifts, am I being a good or a bad manager of these gifts?

Am I using them well or am I squandering and wasting them?

Am I hoarding my time, my talents and my treasures and only spending them on myself, or am I using them to make a difference in the lives of others?

We call today Re-Covenanting Sunday when we renew our commitment to God and to our common ministry here at St. Andrew's. In essence what we are doing is recommitting ourselves to be good managers of all God has given us. Today we choose to be good stewards of God's blessings.

PRAYER

Creator God, Architect of the Universe, Owner of all that exists, Lord of our lives, thank you for the wonderful privilege of calling us to be managers of your property.

Thank you for blessing us with time, talents and treasures to spend in the service of your Kingdom. May we always remain faithful to this task, and may our faith never be an end to itself, but show itself in our actions.

We remember the great issues and crisis of our day: Poverty. Hunger. Pollution. Global Warming. Injustice. War. Inequality. Racism. Food Insecurity. The Refugee Crisis. Grant us, and our leaders, wisdom to address all of these important issues and give us the resolve to act as good managers of the resources of the world so that all, and not simply a few, might benefit from the all the blessings you have granted to us.

Bless the ministries of this congregation that particularly express our concern for others, including our Boarding Home Ministry. Our Inn from the Cold Ministry. Our Newmarket Food Pantry Ministry. Our Loaves and Fishes /Canadian Foodgrains Bank Ministry. Our Evangel Hall Ministry and our Christmas Hamper Ministry.

Truly, God is better to give than to receive, for it is in giving that we express our gratitude for all you have given us. Hear these our prayer. In Jesus Name. Amen.

Notes: New Living Translation (NLT) and the Good News Bible (GNB). *Living Faith*. The Presbyterian Church in Canada. 1984.