

Sermon Notes for 11/13/16 (Pentecost 26, Stewardship #1)

Preached at Jehovah Lutheran – St. Paul, MN

Text: Luke 21:19, 34-36

Theme: STANDING FIRM IN FAITH AND PRAYER

Hymn: LBS 503 (O Jesus, I Have Promised)

Introduction: During this week and the next two, we will be examining, on the basis of God’s Word, the definition of stewardship offered by the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. What is Christian stewardship? Here is what the LCMS stewardship board offered some years back in answer to that question: “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.” Today our focus is that the child of God lives life by STANDING FIRM IN FAITH AND PRAYER.

So we want to start today by thinking about who is a Christian – or who is a child of God and a part of God’s family. There are some people who throw around the term “child of God” a bit too freely, as if it were the case that every person is a child of God. Now in a certain sense we can say that all people are children of God – IF we mean by that that each person is a unique creation of our gracious God. Each of us has a unique giftedness and a unique place in history. If that is what we mean by speaking of “children of God,” we would affirm this overwhelmingly.

But in another sense, the phrase “child (or children) of God” has another more specific meaning. It is used more often in Scripture to refer to those who are God’s children by virtue of their covenant relationship with the Lord. Moses said to Israel (Dt. 14:1), “You are children of the Lord your God.” He then goes on to give specific ways in which they were to identify themselves with the Lord. This involved prohibitions on self-laceration or eating what was forbidden or even boiling a kid in its mother’s milk. Such positive commands as the giving of tithes and offerings were to be another unique identifier of God’s people, as well as observations of the sabbatical year and the Sabbath itself.

Hosea records this prophecy about Israel: “In the place where it was said to them, ‘You are not my people,’ it shall be said to them, ‘Children of the living God.’” When people move from the kingdom of darkness into God’s kingdom, they receive a new name and a new status, namely “children of God.” Jesus spoke of disciples who are part of His kingdom: “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.” The peacemakers receive that honored designation, not just those who happen to inhabit a place on planet earth.

When Jesus was questioned about life in the heavenly kingdom, He said that those who are worthy of the new life and resurrection “cannot die anymore, because they are like angels and are children of God, being children of the resurrection (Luke 20:35-36). Children of God are children of the resurrection, those who by faith have been raised to life in Jesus Christ. Children of God anticipate the new life even after we have been laid in the grave and eaten by worms. We are children of resurrection.

John writes in the first chapter of his gospel, “But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God” (Jn. 1:12). In other words, we were not children of God before we trusted Christ as Lord. By faith we become children of God. Or, in the words of Paul (Rom. 8:14), “All who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God.” He even makes it more explicit in Rom. 9:8, “It is not the children of the flesh who are the children of God, but the children of the promise are counted as descendants.” Or in Gal. 3:26, “For in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith.” So it is those who live on the promises of God who may rightly be called in the fullest sense “children of God.”

In 1 John 3:10 the apostle writes, “The children of God and the children of the devil are revealed in this

way: all who do not do what is right are not from God, nor are those who do not love their brothers and sisters.” The main point is this: We need to be sure how we are using the expression “child(ren) of God,” so that we do not imply that God will treat as His children those who reject the Savior and who deny their part in God’s family by denying that Jesus is the Son of God and the Savior of the world.

This is the first part of our message today, standing firm in faith. We see clearly from Scripture that the child of God is one who lives by faith in Jesus. It is a high and holy calling. As we live by faith and prayer, our lives are being conformed more and more to the image of Christ Himself. Faith and joy are twins. Living by faith, we live a free and joyous life, which is just what our Lord intends for His children.

In today’s Gospel, we hear these words of Jesus: “Be on guard so that your hearts are not weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and the worries of this life, and that day does not catch you unexpectedly, like a trap. For it will come upon all who live on the face of the whole earth. Be alert at all times, praying that you may have the strength to escape all these things that will take place, and to stand before the Son of Man.”

Jesus calls us to be standing firm in faith all the way to the end of time. This world will not simply go on forever and ever. There will be a day of judgment, and to stand in that day we must stand firm in faith. Only as we are embraced by our loving Savior can we be spared the horrors that will come upon many people in that last day. Standing firm in faith also leads us to stand firm in prayer. Prayer is the life breath of faith. One cannot be a Christian without living prayerfully, without that constant conversation with our Lord and Master that takes place within the prayer circle. We pray because we cannot stand on our own in that final day – or even on this day. We need the protection and security that only Christ can provide.

In that regard, our Lord promises that He will stand by us each and every day of our lives. That truth leads the child of God to live freely and joyously. We can live as His stewards, managers of all of life for the sake of Christ’s kingdom. This is a very different life from one that simply lives for its own designs.

Prayer is not just for us. It is intended to be a blessing to those around us also. God designs His kingdom to grow and expand from now to the end of time. Paul writes to the Thessalonians in today’s epistle, “Finally, brothers and sisters, pray for us, so that the word of the Lord may spread rapidly and be glorified everywhere, just as it is among you, and that we may be rescued from wicked and evil people; for not all have faith. But the Lord is faithful; he will strengthen you and guard you from the evil one.” God’s stewards, God’s managers of life, need to have that assurance of the Lord’s strengthening and protection as they go about their stewardship of life.

Sometimes even the term “stewardship” has a bad rap. People treat it as the burdensome and joyless exercise of carving out a little of our excess because the church is trying to meet its budget. Nothing could be more joyless or burdensome than just trying to make a budget. But when we see that stewardship is God’s children freely and joyously managing God’s gifts in all of life’s situations, suddenly things begin to look very different. Our giving is not an attempt to manipulate God into doing something. Rather, it is one of the ways that we live out our thanksgiving for the God who is, above else, a giving and gracious Father.

If I simply spend and spend without reference to what God is up to in me and around me, that sort of financial activity is hardly to be called “Christian stewardship.” But as a child of God, I realize that, when I order our household budget to reflect God’s purposes, I am involved in financial planning at the highest possible order of things. Then I can manage that budgeting freely and joyously, even when it seems that the end of the money comes before the end of the month.

In a related arena, if I spend the hours in my day just pursuing my own goals and dreams and desires with no thought as to what God wants to do in and through me, that is dead-end living. But if I arrange my days so that I have time to interact with others, especially with unbelievers, so they can see Christ living through me, that is strategic living that rightly bears the name – “Christian stewardship.” That kind of living blesses the people around me as Christ touches them through me.

Self-indulgent living that aims at getting me the greatest pleasure for the greatest number of hours in a day provides no real joy and gets that “dead-end living” label. However, when I am living to serve those around me with the strength and ability that God provides, Christian stewardship is exactly what I am living out. And that is the life to which we are called when we are baptized into the death and the resurrection of Jesus.

Christian stewardship is the free and joyous activity of the child of God and of God’s family, the church. Each of us as a child of God is also part of the family of God. That means that we take concern for the other members of the body of Christ, the other members of God’s family, as much as (and even more than) we take concern for ourselves. Paul writes (Rom. 15:2), “Each of us must please our neighbor for the good purpose of building up the neighbor.” And in Philippians 2:4 he says, “Let each of you look not only to your own interests, but to the interests of others.”

In a recent issue of *The Lutheran Layman*, Lutheran Hour speaker Gregory Seltz writes (*The Lutheran Layman*, Nov/Dec 2016): “Your calling, whatever you are doing in life, is to show God’s love to other people . . . You get to pour love and care into their lives. That’s your job, your calling. It’s your vocation . . . But that wonderful calling can become buried by a busy life, a distracted life, a life of despair. If you’re a parent, you know what I mean. You get so caught up in keeping up, so much so that you forget your main purpose is to love your kids, to lead your kids! The list of things to do grows long; the messes around the house overwhelm. Task after task can take you away from the reason you had children in the first place. You lose your focus on your purpose . . . You have a delightful job to do. You get to bless people. You get to show God’s love . . . You get to live in the life that He gifts you with, in Christ – love meant for you, love meant for all.”

What a vision of the life of stewardship! That life is not something we are required to do. It is not something that is demanded of us by a harsh taskmaster of a god. It is the life that we are called to live in Jesus’ name. It is the life that we are empowered to live by His Spirit’s power. It is the life that consistently seeks to bless those around me as I have been blessed by the Lord.

Conclusion: The child of God, made so through faith in the Savior, stands in faith and prayer. That means that the child of God lives faithfully and prayerfully as he or she seeks to orchestrate life so that it conforms to God’s purposes. This is our high calling as children of the living God. He has claimed us as His own by the dying and rising of His Son Jesus. He ushers us into His forever family through the water and Word of Holy Baptism. And He gives us the joy and the freedom to live as His children for the sake of those around us. May that life be our constant goal and our constant endeavor! For the sake of Jesus our Lord, AMEN!