

Sermon Notes for 11/27/16 (Advent 1, Stewardship #3)

Preached at Jehovah Lutheran – St. Paul, MN

Text: Matthew 21:1-11

Theme: LIFE, JOYFUL RESPONSE TO THE COMING KING

The Point: Handling life joyfully for God’s purposes begins with faith and finds expression in open-handed generosity, open-mouthed praise, and open-door hospitality.

Introduction: On this first Sunday of the new church year, Christians around the world are marking the start of the Advent season. The term “Advent” comes from the Latin and means “coming” or more literally “he comes” or “he is coming.” As we round out our fall stewardship campaign this week, we want to think about **LIFE**, as a **JOYFUL RESPONSE TO THE COMING KING**. In the first of the three-part sermon series we stressed the key role of faith, that relationship by which we are made part of the family of God. Last week we looked especially at the importance of our use of material goods and money as expressive of managing all of life’s resources for God’s purposes. This week we sum up our look at the definition of stewardship offered within our LCMS circles, namely “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.” All of life – this matter of Christian stewardship is not just about what we put into the offering basket (or bag). It relates to every choice, every decision, every word, every plan, every action that we take in the course of a lifetime connected to Jesus.

Once we live by faith in the Savior, all of life becomes part of our response. I don’t know whether any of you have ever had your life saved by another person – a lifeguard who rescued you from drowning, a friend who performed CPR when your heart had stopped, or a doctor whose surgical skills saved you from an early death. If so, you have probably wanted to do whatever you could to recognize and praise the person who saved you. You probably speak of that person to others in glowing terms. You may have ordered your life to be a thank-offering for what they have done, even choosing a vocation that reflected their involvement in your life. If this is the case, you may have had a glimpse of what we mean by stewardship as a life lived in joyful response to our King Jesus. If not, you might need to listen a bit more closely this morning.

“Managing all of life and life’s resources for God’s purposes” – now that is a handful! Let’s think about God’s purposes on the basis of today’s readings. What are God’s purposes with respect to our lives? Let’s look at each of today’s readings from that vantage point.

How did the people in today’s Gospel account order their lives for God’s purposes? Well, think about several of the different folks who appear there. First, we have the two disciples who follow Jesus’ command to the letter. I doubt that even these closest of His apostles understood (at least, not until after the resurrection) just what was taking place with Jesus on this Palm Sunday. Still, even without full understanding, they did what Jesus called them to do. That is a key for each of us as well. We who live by faith respond to the Lord’s call, even when we don’t understand what He is trying to accomplish.

Then there is the man who owned the donkey and its colt. When he challenged the disciples who were untying his animals, the simple words convinced him: “The Lord needs them.” Whether he knew the prophecy of Zechariah or had any idea that he was enabling its fulfillment, still he acted to serve the Lord. **Open-handed generosity** marks the person who is managing life for God’s purposes. God has made us so that we might reflect His generosity and kindness in our own liberality. If the Lord needs it, then my grasp on “it” (whatever it may be) should be loose indeed.

The story is told that one day a beggar by the roadside asked for alms from Alexander the Great as he

passed by. The man was poor and wretched and had no claim upon the ruler, no right even to lift a solicitous hand to his liege. Yet the Emperor threw him several gold coins. One of Alexander's courtiers was astonished at his generosity and commented, "Sir, copper coins would adequately meet a beggar's need. Why give him gold?" Alexander responded in royal fashion, "Copper coins would suit the beggar's need, but gold coins suit Alexander's giving." Here is our question for our stewardship: What suits the giving of those who have been made priests and kings by the blood of the Son of the living God?

Matthew also portrays the crowds who welcomed Jesus into Jerusalem. Their actions acknowledged the coming of a King. Did they know that this Jesus, the famed prophet from Nazareth, had come as their Messiah? Perhaps a few did. No doubt most did not. Here was a king, after all, who did not look much like a king. He had no home of His own. He had no retirement account or IRA or savings passbook. He had no army or militia or war machines. He had no fancy retinue or glittering crown. He was about to suffer the sort of death reserved for the worst of criminals. On Palm Sunday, He rode a donkey into town. That this was the sign of a king coming in peace may not have been in their hearts.

But they still sang the words of Psalm 118 as part of their welcome to Jesus: "Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest heaven!" The purpose of God as summed up in this lesson really speaks to our call to honor, serve, love, and obey Jesus, our Messiah and our King. **Open-mouthed praise** springs from the heart of the person who is managing life for God's purposes. For the purpose of God is that we would love, honor, and praise Him forever.

John Wesley was about 21 years of age when he went to Oxford University. He came from a Christian home, gifted with a keen mind and good looks. Yet in those days he was also a bit snobbish and sarcastic. One night, however, something happened that set in motion a change in Wesley's heart. While speaking with a porter, he discovered that the poor fellow had only one coat and lived in such impoverished conditions that he didn't even have a bed. Yet he was an unusually happy person, filled with gratitude to God. Wesley, being immature, thoughtlessly joked about the man's misfortunes. "And what else do you thank God for?" he said with a touch of sarcasm. The porter smiled, and in the spirit of meekness replied with joy, "I thank Him that He has given me my life and being, a heart to love Him, and above all a constant desire to serve Him!" Deeply moved, Wesley recognized that this man knew the meaning of true thankfulness. Many years later, in 1791, John Wesley lay on his deathbed at the age of 88. Those who gathered around him realized how well he had learned the lesson of praising God in every circumstance. Despite Wesley's extreme weakness, he began singing the hymn, "I'll Praise My Maker While I've Breath." (*Our Daily Bread*) We also are made to be generous. We are made to praise our Lord as long as we have breath.

We have been made children of light, according to Paul's words in Romans 13. The resulting call is to "Love your neighbor as yourself." This is God's purpose for you, that your life is being spent in love for others. You have been created as one who reflects the image of God in your generosity, in your praise of God, and in your hospitality toward others.

Who are those others for whom you are spending your time and energy and resources? Is your life designed to lift the name of Jesus before the eyes of your family? Do your friends have a hint that you are a follower of Jesus? Do your co-workers see the difference that it makes for you to live by faith in the Savior? Does your life reflect purposes that are more than just "eat, drink, and be merry"? In other words, as Paul puts it, "let us live honorably as in the day, not in reveling and drunkenness, not in debauchery and licentiousness, not in quarreling and jealousy. Instead, put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires." As you by faith put on for your daily clothing the grace and mercy of the Lord Jesus, you are living life toward God's purposes.

From the Old Testament lesson, we read that “the mountain of the Lord’s house shall be established as the highest of the mountains, and . . . all nations shall stream to it.” God is out to be honored and glorified by a passel of folks. The prophet sees all nations streaming to the mountain of God, seeking instruction, knowledge, and guidance for life. Is my life ordered to encourage that sort of streaming? Do I take time to get to know people from other cultures and backgrounds? Do I put my own needs last so that I can put first the needs of those whom God has placed around me? Do I pour myself into them for Christ’s sake? Am I managing life for God’s purposes? **Open-door hospitality** is part and parcel of the life being managed for God’s purposes. After all, some have even entertained angels unawares through their exercise of the gift of hospitality.

A minister preached one day on heaven. The next morning, he was met by a wealthy church member, who said: “Pastor, you preached a good sermon about heaven, but you did not tell me where heaven is.” “Ah,” said the pastor, “I have just come from the hill yonder. In that cottage, there is a member of our church who is very poor; she is sick and in bed with fever. If you will go and take her a good supply of provisions and say, ‘My sister, I have brought these provisions in the name of Jesus,’ if you ask for a Bible and read Psalm 23, and then get down on your knees and pray – if you don’t see heaven before you get all through, I’ll pay the bill.” The next morning the wealthy man reported: “Pastor, I saw heaven, and I spent fifteen minutes in heaven, as sure as you are listening.” (*Gospel Herald*). Open-door hospitality finds joy in serving others with the Spirit of Jesus Christ, for then we are managing life’s resources for God’s purposes, as He desires for us to do.

Conclusion: Handling life joyfully for God’s purposes begins with faith and finds expression in open-handed generosity, open-mouthed praise, and open-door hospitality. May our Lord grant us repentance from our sins of self-centeredness, greed, and miserliness! And may His good Spirit turn our hearts toward full obedience to the King who has come all the way into our world and experienced our loneliness and our cold-heartedness and our hatred! This King did not for a moment hesitate to suffer for those who had opposed Him at every turn, but offered His back to the ones who beat Him and his cheek to the one who pulled out His beard. In every way, He lived out His call to love all people, even His enemies, with a love that would not quit. Let His praises ring from our lips, so that generosity and hospitality might shine forth from our lives, in the saving name of Jesus our King. AMEN!