

# STEWARDSHIP SERMON STARTERS

For use with

## “Ordinary People, Extraordinary Lives”

New Jersey Synod, ELCA

The following ideas are intended to stimulate the imagination of the preacher. Use these lectionary texts and ideas to guide your prayerful preparation of sermons during the fall stewardship season. The following lectionary resources are intended for use on September 26, October 10, 24 and November 7 and 21, 2010. In addition to this material which is gleaned from “The Stewardship Companion” (Westminster John Knox Press, 2007) you will want to visit <http://www.elca.org/Growing-In-Faith/Discipleship/Stewardship/Stewardship-Now/Sermon-Starters.aspx> for additional stewardship preaching resources.

### SEPTEMBER 26, 2010

#### “Those who want to be rich fall into temptation and are trapped.” (1 Tim. 6:9)

In this last portion of 1 Timothy Paul offers closing words of guidance to Timothy. Paul writes, “But as for you, man of God...” and sets the context for his wise and faithful counsel. Paul wants Timothy to be faithful to his stewardship calling.

Paul wishes for Timothy to live a life that befits the gospel. For Paul, lifestyle is more about style than life. What is important is to live, “in godliness combined with contentment.” If Timothy achieves this lofty goal, then he will indeed be an ordinary person leading an extraordinary life.

I suspect that the supreme temptation for the present believer is trying to fit in. Certainly we see these pressures on our children as they maneuver through the early days of the school year. But adults suffer the same malady. In striving for more and better, we become more like those who have gained the whole world and forfeited their life. Paul knows what is at stake.

Paul knows that, “those who want to be rich fall into temptation and are trapped by many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction.” The character Lou Mannheim in the film *Wall Street* said, “The main thing about money, Bud, is that it makes you do things you don’t want to do.” That is because money and possessions have become the idols to “lust after”.

Paul’s admonition is easier to hear than to live. It takes an extraordinary life to really believe that the best things in life are free! Loving family, friends, the satisfaction we gain from helping others. Did I mention GRACE? Still many ordinary people live as if the gospel may not be true. Faithful stewards trust the God provides, and because of that, we, like Timothy, are free to live an extraordinary life.

**October 10, 2010**

**“Seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile” (Jer. 29:7)**

This Hebrew Scripture lesson cites part of a letter that Jeremiah wrote to those whom Nebuchadnezzar had taken into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon. No doubt these exiles were troubled over losing their way of life and home. These are also words the 2,600 years later Christian stewards can appeal to for guidance as our way of life, and homes are in peril through economic recession.

God had blessed his people for centuries as occupants of the land God had given to them. Now the nation found itself without land, without temple, without a home as they had known it. Patriotism (nationalism) was being questioned and redefined. Instead of lamenting the situation of the exiles, Jeremiah offers encouragement: “Build houses...plant gardens...take wives...multiply there. ...Seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile...for in its welfare you will find your welfare.”

This is classic Jeremiah. When the nation faces doom; Jeremiah buys a field from his cousin Hanamel. The Lord’s word via Jeremiah encourages the exiles to embrace “the welfare of the city where I have sent you.” This is a good word for the steward who seeks to lead an extraordinary life.

Jeremiah’s word benefits faithful stewards and suggests that God will not return to recreate the past. The past is past. Jeremiah helps us to understand that ordinary people can lead extraordinary lives when they embrace the only true reality...the one we live in now. Whether a steward lives in Jerusalem or Babylon, good times or bad, sickness, or health; God calls stewards to be faithful where God has planted us.

**October 24, 2010**

**“The time of my departure has come.” (2 Tim 4:6)**

In this second letter to Timothy, Paul seeks to offer encouragement to one who must look ahead.

One of the ways that we “take stock” of our lives is to look to the past. Where are the places of success, the places of missed opportunity? This perspective can help stewards measure their progress. Paul uses sacrificial language about his ministry. Then he goes on to use sports metaphors that would have been commonly understood by ordinary people... “Fought the good fight, finished the race.” Such language gives authenticity to Paul’s experience. Paul knows what he is writing about. Paul’s own experience in proclaiming the gospel gives his words credence for the young Timothy.

As stewards, to use an old cliché, we must practice what we preach. When Paul counsels Timothy, he does so as one who walks the path of faith. He is an ordinary person, leading an extraordinary life. As

stewards, the chief element in sharing the stewardship message with others is to make certain our own house is in order. The most influential stewardship witness we can make is to be a good steward. Our lives offer the most persuasive argument possible about what we believe. Looking back over our stewardship offers proof about our extraordinary life if Jesus Christ.

## **November 7, 2010**

### **“This is the pledge of our inheritance toward redemption.” (Eph. 1:14)**

The church has two primary understandings about what a saint is. We remember the departed believers who handed to us the faith experience in Jesus Christ. In addition, the term “saint” can refer to any person, living or dead, who belongs to the body of Christ.

The Epistle today addresses the concept of the inheritance the believers have received from God. To be precise, “in Christ we have also obtained an inheritance...so that we...might live for the praise of his Glory.” Thus, stewards express both gratitude and praise. Nothing pleases God like ordinary people leading extraordinary lives of faith.

The word that we use for stewardship derives from the Greek word that in English we render as “economy”. Stewardship basically means “to manage a household”. We tend to apply this only to financial issues, yet everything Christians manage is a household. We are stewards over power, devotion, spiritual life, prayer, relationships, worship, support of others, and benevolence.

In modern times we usually think of an inheritance as consisting of land, stocks, bonds, or other financial and material assets. In the first century, people considered inheritance in similar fashion. The author of Ephesians, however, writes about a believer’s divine inheritance that can never be taken away or squandered. No one can remove our inheritance of salvation. Genuine stewards practice managing the household of faith and salvation that God gives to us as heirs. This promise transforms the behaviors of ordinary people into extraordinary lives.

## **November 21, 2010**

### **“There was an inscription over him, ‘This is the King of the Jews’” (Luke 23:38)**

Luke uses the ironic title “This is the King of the Jews” to emblazon the cross. The Bible bursts with irony—Moses the “slow of tongue” becomes the mouthpiece of God; Rahab, a foreign prostitute saves Israel’s spies. At times irony reveals God’s power working through ordinary people leading extraordinary lives.

We live in a “me first, individual rights, consumer culture” and take inordinate pride in the possessions that we control. This contributes to our reluctance to share even the story of Jesus and the salvation that he intends for all of creation. As stewards, the most faithful way for us to respond to the gospel is to live as if we really believed that God owns everything. To live as obedient stewards is a profession of faith. To live as if God’s ownership matters entails a life of discipleship, an extraordinary life.