

**Christ Lutheran Stewardship Talk – Presented by Roxanne Ostlund on November 13, 2016**

The mention of “Stewardship” can bring fear, greed or even boredom to the hearts of men and women – money, money, money may be the thought – but that is not what it is about. Stewardship is about “others” in every way . . . time, talents, evangelism and sometimes money. I just saw a post on facebook from a friend soliciting prayers for a family who lost their baby boy just a week old. Amid all the praying posts was a post that said “give them my contact information, we lost our baby girl at 4 months old – and it helps to talk to someone who has experienced the same loss” . . . THAT is stewardship in its purest form.

“Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, making the best use of the time, because the days are evil” (Ephesians 5:15–16 ESV). Such a reminder not to waste time, opportunities and talents. The totality of stewardship: pay attention, observe, *really* see, then act. So many opportunities come and go . . . unnoticed.

When I was in college a questionnaire was left at my apartment with the question: “do you know what Grace is”. Well, I was sure this was some poor victim working on a thesis, so I responded to help out. Of course I do – it is what you say at the table before you eat (well some people do, not me except at Thanksgiving of course). I received a visit. I was shown a bible with the verse “For by Grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God”. Say what? It is NOT by works? Well this had to be some weird cult bible I was sure. We all know you just have to be good . . . I went to the library (yes I actually knew where it was) – I checked out the myriad of bibles there – and indeed, it says that, it says you are saved by Grace!

When I was first aware of this amazing concept that “*You are saved by grace not by works; it is a gift*” I was on fire with this news. I even went back to the minister of the church I went to in high school, asking him why he didn’t tell me this *big important news*? And I told everyone I knew; I told my friends, I told my family, and I even told strangers . . . *for a while*.

My clients are also my friends and I care much about them. But now I quote from the obituary of one of these friends that I carry in my purse as a stark reminder:

My friend at 34 died from exposure to the elements early January 2011 in a remote area of Carbon County. He was found May 4. Until the economic downturn and his continuing struggle with drugs, my friend ran a highly successful company and was well respected in his field.

As his life was ebbing away in that “remote area of carbon county” I wonder if he called upon Jesus?

I don’t know, but what I *do* know is that I did not tell him about Jesus. At this stage in my life, I wish I had accomplished many more things than I have. I wish I had told more people this good news. I wish I would have sponsored more children in impoverished lands. I wish I would have known about all I *could* have done. I wish I would have been and done so many more things.

In the book, *The Treasure Principle* by Randy Alcorn, he talks about realizing what you wish you would have given more to immediately after you die. I would propose instead that we realize what we should have given more to immediately after someone else dies: a friend, a co-worker, a neighbor, or a hungry child.

Be careful then how you live, not as unwise people but as wise, making the most of the time, because the days are evil. (Ephesians 5:15–16 ESV)

I read a high-impact devotional, a definite indicator of the *living* Word. A verse I’m sure I’d read many times, or shall I more accurately say, I’d unconsciously glossed over several times. It hit me like a brick (which is usually how God has to get my attention).

All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and *gave us the ministry of reconciliation*; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and *entrusting to us the message of reconciliation*. *Therefore we are ambassadors for Christ, God making His appeal through us.*” (2 Corinthians 5:18–20f ESV)

Oh yes, I'm thinking that describes me exactly, every day I put on my ambassadorial suit and implore others to be reconciled to God. "Hello, my name is Roxanne." "And what do you do Roxanne?" "Oh, I'm an ambassador for Christ." Boy, that would change my perspective daily! . . . well, if I implemented it. That would truly affect all my actions. I should put a sign on my mirror to look at each morning (better put on my desk also) because I tend to "forget."

In fact just a couple of hours later as I was driving I noticed a young, unkempt, seemingly vulnerable, probably homeless, young man walking down the sidewalk with a backpack. I had an instant thought to stop and say, "Hello, God noticed you and told me to stop and just let you know he cared about you. Here is \$20 for a hot meal." And do you know what happened when I acted on this thought? No? Neither do I—because I did not act on that thought. The fact that I am writing about it and remembering it sends a very chilling and clear message to me. There have been a number of times when I have noticed various people and had that same very strong thought—just to tell them that God has *noticed* them and cares about them. How hard would that be? How hard would that be as an ambassador for Christ?

I had a very interesting meeting at the end of the day with a client. I thought for a moment I would not be able to keep from crying in front of him. He is an older man in his 70s, very independent, with few friends. From looking at him, you wouldn't think he had a dime to his name and maybe came directly from the homeless shelter. Nay, nay—he has plenty of money. Certainly more than me. But this meeting wasn't about money or taxes as I had supposed.

He started by saying "oh those doctors know how to get into your pocket." He talked vaguely about "a problem" and taking chemo. He said they don't really tell you anything, and he didn't know what to expect. He went alone for treatment. He talked about other people having people there with them during treatment, playing cards, on their cell phones, and so on. He said he didn't have a cell phone, and the few "friends" he had, well, he couldn't impose—they were busy with their things to do. He talked about the first chemo and feeling kind of frisky the next day—for about an hour—then spent the rest of the day hunkered over sick in the bathroom.

He talked about a nausea pill they gave him. He took it, nothing seemed out of order. After an hour he got up and said he was lucky to grab hold of the sink in time to keep from falling. He repeated again they don't tell you what to expect. I felt badly for him. He said he didn't know why he talked so long to me. He had maybe one "sort of" close friend, but they didn't really talk. He said, "I guess I am a hermit." I wished I had time to go sit with him for a day during his next chemo. *I wished I had time to sit with him, but I have to work. I have to do irrelevant tax returns; I can't sit with someone who is ill and possibly dying, can I?* I am reminded of the Simon and Garfunkel song—"A Most Peculiar Man." "He had no friends, he seldom spoke, and no one in turn ever spoke to him because he wasn't friendly and he didn't care, and he wasn't like them. Oh no." . . . Yes, in fact, he is like us all.

I met with another client and asked the customary question, "How did your year go?" expecting the customary answer "fine, nothing unusual." But that was not the answer I got—a pervasive sadness swept over him, even his skin color changed to a deep red—it was awful, he said. My renter committed suicide. "Was he your friend also?" "Yes, we had been friends since our youth." "Do you know why he did it?" "Not really, but I think medical issues and not enough money to pay to fix them. I would have given him the money, not as a loan either. I don't lend money. It is just a gift. I would have given him the money" he wept. And the hideous circle has repeated itself, the desperately hurting go unnoticed, unidentified by the busy world.

I'm reminded of the lyrics of a song by Brandon Heath:

Give me Your eyes for just one second;

Give me Your eyes so I can see

Everything that I keep missing.

Give me Your love for humanity.

Give me Your arms for the broken hearted,

The ones that are far beyond my reach.

Give me Your heart for the ones forgotten;

Give me Your eyes so I can see.

Step out on a busy street

See a girl and our eyes meet.

Does her best to smile at me

To hide what's underneath.

There's a man just to her right,

Black suit and bright red tie,

Too ashamed to tell his wife

He's out of work;

He's buying time.

All those people going somewhere.

Why have I never cared?

Give me Your eyes for just one second.

Give me Your eyes so I can see

Everything that I keep missing.

Give me Your love for humanity.

Give me Your arms for the broken hearted,

The ones that are far beyond my reach.

Give me Your heart for the ones forgotten.

Give me Your eyes so I can see.

. . . well, I want a second glance,

So give me a second chance

To see the way You see the people all along!

The stewardship call is simple “go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you, and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”

Fulfill the commission. The money will come.