

**Sermon on Christian Stewardship Sunday**  
**Jan. 22, 2017.**  
**University Chapel**  
**At 7: 00 a.m.**

**Let us pray:**

To you alone, O Lord, we bring our grateful thanks and praise.

You, Lord, are with us always, your loving arms encircling and sheltering us from harm.

It is your song that we shall sing, of forgiveness, and God's kingdom revealed upon the earth.

To you alone, O Lord, we bring our grateful thanks and praise.

Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight O Lord, my strength and my Redeemer. Amen.

Theme: God's World-

What is our calling as God's Stewards?

**Introduction:** God is at work in the world. In our world of rapidly changing political, social and economic structures God is working God's purpose out. We are called to join as partners in God's mission. It is a call to journey with God and to live the reckless life of faith

My experience on Friday afternoon as one called to give answers to two questions which are on the lips of the people of our nation.

The first asked of me was in the parking lot of a large shopping mall. I was asked quite loudly what the Church has got to say in regard to the Moravian pastor's sexual abuse of the teenage girl. The lady was very angry. She accused the church of speaking out on homosexuality, and a photograph on the cover of the telephone directory. Another lady said to me immediately after that, that the Church cannot ignore so many negative things that the newly installed US president has said.

All of the passages for today address the topic; what is our calling as stewards in God's world.

**Isaiah 49: 1-7 tell us that we are called to be servants**

Through Israel's words the writer reminds the readers that God was there from the beginning, even from before birth, and that this faithful God (who expects us to be faithful stewards) will continue to be there and to call them and us, but in an entirely new way. Instead of power and grandeur, **there is a new role for the people of God;** it is to the one of **servant hood**, in order that the presence of God- made visible in utter powerlessness- may be revealed. In times of crisis the people are told not to live for themselves only (verse 6: The Lord said to me, "I have a greater task for you, my servant. Not only will you

restore to greatness of the people of Israel who have survived, but I will also make you a light to the nations—so that all the world may be saved.”) They are given as light to the nations.

What is this saying to us the churches, which from time to time experience similar crises, like that now being experienced by our sister Moravian Church?

In my opinion, making statements to the press doesn't change anything.

Well, the passage stands as an encouragement to all of us, not to batten down the hatches, but to listen anew to God's calling to serve the community, so that God's salvation may reach to the end of the earth.

### **Psalm 40: 1-11 speaks of: Called to proclaim**

The psalmist tells us that God can be trusted in times of distress as the Israelites experienced when they were delivered from slavery in Egypt. But they learn that this God does not want sacrifices and offering in return. But instead gives even more: an open ear. God is enabling God's people to hear God's calling, and to discern God's will that his saving justice may be proclaimed in the great congregation.

We, God's stewards are reminded as well that when we experience God's love and justice we must speak out. For it is in that way that God's justice will multiply.

What should our prayer be? It is this: **Serving God, give us courage as your faithful stewards to proclaim your enduring love through our words and actions.**

**Christian Stewardship is not some specialized area that the church is called upon to emphasize. It is all part of ministry which Jesus exercised.**

**In Matthew 5** Jesus outlines the way he calls his disciples to live. This way is folly for the world. How can we be blessed if we are poor in spirit, meek and mourning? How can we love our enemies, give all that we have and turn the other cheek? These attitudes are contrary to mainstream culture. But, guess what! They are the ways of the kingdom of God, which are upside-down in contrast to the 'kingdoms' of the world. The world's kingdoms are based on competition, power which controls others, narrow nationalism as expounded by president Trump, and the need to win and to increase wealth and influence. The kingdom of Jesus is based upon humility, love for people and the gift of self. It is based upon the presence of God among us, calling us to love in a totally new way. As Christ's stewards we can only live the charter of this kingdom if we receive a new strength, if we are reborn in the Spirit of God, the Holy Spirit. The living poverty of spirit, meekness, and persecution becomes a blessing because God is with us, warming our hearts, guiding us, and protecting us, writes Jean Vanier- a

member of a community in France. At the heart of them all is the belief that people with learning disabilities, so often rejected by society, are important to God.

One of the founding texts of l'Arche is Luke 14: 12-15. Then Jesus said to his host, **“When you give a lunch or a dinner, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or your rich neighbours---for they will invite you back, and in this way you will be paid for what you did. When you give a feast, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind, and you will be blessed, because they are not able to pay you back. God will repay you on the day the good people rise from death.”**

When one of the men sitting at table heard this, he said to Jesus, “How happy are those who will sit down at the feast in the Kingdom of God.”

(This challenged me as I read it. I did not invite those people mentioned in the text to my house warming party! It was family and friends I invited.

What would have done?

Quite likely, it's a challenge to each of us to think much more of ministering to those people.)

**Jesus- the Chief Steward set priorities and could never be distracted from them.**

He said: ‘Strive first for the Kingdom of God’ (Matt. 6:33). He also said: ‘No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the Kingdom of God’ (Luke 9:

62). And also: 'I must proclaim the good news to the other cities, also.'

Jesus the Chief Steward has empowered us his Church to go forth and invite all and sundry to the great banquet.

Matthew 19: 13- 14 tell us that: Some people brought children to Jesus for him to place his hands on them, but the disciples scolded the people.

Jesus said, **“Let the children come to me and do not stop them, because the Kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these.”**

He placed his hands on them and then went away.

What a charge we stewards of God have to care for the youngest to the eldest among us?

The story is told of a 3 year old child Erin who was watching a rainbow being formed. When she saw a curve of vivid colours she exclaimed, “It’s a rainbow, and it’s come to stay!” The rainbow didn’t last. The hope is that she will not lose her sense of wonder. Our task is to train and nurture them.

Have you ever asked the question, what is the kingdom of heaven like? The Pharisees did not think of asking that question, because they had other things on their minds. They were trying to trap Jesus by asking him what was lawful. Later, his disciples tried to protect him by asking mothers to take their distracting children away.

But the kingdom of heaven has a way of breaking through and widening all our horizons.

The Pharisees asked legalistic questions about divorce. In a society where women were often seen as the property of- and problems for- men, divorce seemed a solution.

Jesus responded that men and women were both created by God, in marriage, when they have become one. Human beings should honour that, not try to undo God's work.

And what about those whose sexuality is different. If eunuchs, castrated or born that way cannot reproduce, are they outside God's plan for humankind? Jesus reminded his hearers that some 'chose to live like eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven' which can include- and be honoured by our differences.

Women and eunuchs were both outsiders. Children, also, in many cultures have been seen as second class citizens.

So many over the years have been, and continue to be abused and killed in our culture. Some have been seen as the property of adults, exploited, often ignored.

Jesus has a stern warning for such exploiters. Let us examine our lives in that regard, and challenge and expose perpetrators.

Jesus welcomed the children with care, Celebrating their innocence and joy. Let us, God's stewards recognize that children are very dear to God. Their wonder holds the secrets of the kingdom.

**Matthew 4: 12-23** sums up what our response should be as Jesus calls us o'er the tumult of our life's wild restless sea.

**Day by day his sweet voice soundeth  
Saying, Christian! Follow me.**

Jesus called his first disciples with the words "Come with me, and I will teach you to catch people."

The word to us therefore is: **No need to fear**

Light has come into the darkness, hope has come into hopelessness; healing has come to sickness all through Jesus Christ. Jesus calls Simon and Andrew, James and John in this moment, but he calls all people to repent—those in first-century Galilee and those across time. He calls you to repent, he calls me to repent. And why this call to repentance? Because "the Kingdom of heaven has come near."

The nearness of the Kingdom of heaven asks us for a change of direction, a change of behavior, the Kingdom of heaven demands obedience, a readiness to follow. It's a hard place to be. God calls and asks for response.

However, we are in good hands. Jesus begins his ministry by speaking the truth and calling his disciples, but he also begins by healing. He heals all those who come to him with illnesses. Jesus heals physical sicknesses and also soul sicknesses. He roots out our greed and lies, our obsessions and selfishness. (Many a world leader needs this right now.). He reaches out to us saying: "Follow



me.” By following in obedience we find a better way, a difficult way—but one that brings joy and peace. All we have to do is follow.

**Jesus calls us by Thy mercies  
Saviour make us hear Thy call.  
Give our hearts to Thine obedience,  
Serve and love Thee best of all.**

**PAUSE FOR A MOMENT.**

**Let us pray:**

Jesus, the Light of the nearness of the kingdom shines on our path. May we choose to follow and obey.  
In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.  
Amen.

**Hymn:** Called as partners in Christ’s service.