

10.11.26 ~ Pentecost 20

“Stewardship Promises”

The United Baptist Church, Annandale, VA

Words of Stewardship

Malachi 3:3c-12 ^{TLB}

Pew Bible 830

³ . . . so that they will do their work for God with pure hearts. ⁴ Then once more the Lord will enjoy the offerings brought to him by the people of Judah and Jerusalem, as he did before. ⁵ At that time my punishments will be quick and certain; I will move swiftly against wicked men who trick the innocent, against adulterers and liars, against all those who cheat their hired hands, who oppress widows and orphans, or defraud strangers, and do not fear me,” says the Lord Almighty.

⁶ “For I am the Lord—I do not change. That is why you are not already utterly destroyed, for my mercy endures forever.

⁷ “Though you have scorned my laws from earliest time, yet you may still return to me,” says the Lord Almighty. “Come and I will forgive you.

“But you say, ‘We have never even gone away!’

⁸ “Will a man rob God? Surely not! And yet you have robbed me.

“‘What do you mean? When did we ever rob you?’

“You have robbed me of the tithes and offerings due me. ⁹ And so the awesome curse of God is cursing you, for your whole nation has been robbing me. ¹⁰ Bring all the tithes into the storehouse so that there will be food enough in my Temple; if you do, I will open up the windows of heaven for you and pour out a blessing so great you won’t have room enough to take it in!

“Try it! Let me prove it to you! ¹¹ Your crops will be large, for I will guard them from insects and plagues. Your grapes won’t shrivel away before they ripen,” says the Lord Almighty. ¹² “And all nations will call you blessed, for you will be a land sparkling with happiness. These are the promises of the Lord Almighty.

Leader: These Are God’s Words. People: Thanks be to God!

Words of Instruction

Luke 12:22-32 ^{NIV}

Pew Bible 905

²² Then Jesus said to his disciples: “Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat; or about your body, what you will wear. ²³ For life is more than food, and the body more than clothes. ²⁴ Consider the ravens: They do not sow or reap; they have no storeroom or barn; yet God feeds them. And how much more valuable you are than birds! ²⁵ Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to your life? ²⁶ Since you cannot do this very little thing, why do you worry about the rest?

²⁷ “Consider how the wildflowers grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you, not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. ²⁸ If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today, and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, how much more will he clothe you—you of little faith! ²⁹ And do not set your heart on what you will eat or drink; do not worry about it. ³⁰ For the pagan world

runs after all such things, and your Father knows that you need them. ³¹ But seek his kingdom, and these things will be given to you as well.

³² “Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom.

Leader: These Are Jesus’ Words. People: Thanks be to God!

Please pray with me:

Generous God, we come again this Sunday to worship and learn new motivations about our faith and stewardship. We thank you for the full week of living, working, volunteering, praying, and rejoicing. You bless us with many responsibilities and the gifts to patiently manage them all. We ask you to relieve any stress or worry in our lives, especially surrounding money and health. Help us to create more time to study and apply your word throughout the week. Open our minds to creative resources and open our mouths to invite others to know you and to meet you here. Speak through this message and messenger. In Jesus’ name we pray, Amen.

This is the last message on Stewardship for this year, although I ask you to continue to pray for insights and discussions around church vision and mission. God has been good to us this year providing for our needs; you have been generous in your giving; and building usage has increased. But remember, we do utilize our investment savings and interest to fulfill our obligations, so I ask you for careful consideration in planning your tithes for 2027. Let’s “spend” some “time” with these popular verses to help us discern forthcoming decisions.

Malachi is written in the Fifth Century after the Jews could return to Judah from exile. The background and first chapters announce being prepared for the forerunner, the Messiah, refiner, and purifier, reminding the hearers and today’s readers of God’s covenant. They assumed the messenger would be Elijah coming back or perhaps Malachi (the Greek *mal’akhi* means messenger) to deliver the prophecy and tell them what to do. They thought their immediate instruction was to cleanse the temple to

prepare God's house for the Master, so that God could right the wrongs and injustices they had experienced.

God, however, was not just concerned with cleansing defiled sacrifices, correcting their rituals and symbols but he was more concerned with the human heart of the nation of Israel which had become sinful and turned away from him. God used Malachi's voice to explain that superficial improvements to the temple and decimated lands were not enough to please him or re-build relationship with him. He addressed the sins of both spiritual and social nature, reminding them they would be judged. Israel had always been faithless, but if they return to God, God will return to them. They needed to change their attitudes through repentance but also needed to take action to prove their contrition. He uses dramatic language to get their attention: "stop robbing God!" no matter how hard the times are! Let me explain that a bit.

In early Malachi, the judgment was on the poor quality of offerings, but in our passage, by Chapter 3, the judgement and criticisms are about quantity. "Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse." The storehouse (Hebrew: *owtsar*) was a specific area for grain to be stored; treasure or storage rooms inside the ancient Jerusalem Temple were where the Israelites brought their grain tithes and offerings. Today we use silos for grain storage and in churches our financial offerings are placed in a basket, offering plate, safe, and insured banking institutions. You could also say our ACCA Nook and Food Mission shelves are storehouses of sorts for donations. Back to our phrase, "bring the **whole** tithe into the storehouse," the writer proclaims that due to the economic hardships of their return and sins, they are holding back on the required 1/10 tithe of

all produce and livestock God has asked them to give ever since Genesis 14:18-20 (Abraham's promise to God), Genesis 28:20-22 (Jacob's vow at Bethel), Leviticus 27:30–34 and Numbers 18 (codified into Law by Moses). The Temple ministry was suffering due to their greed; God promises them that he will reunite and reward their faithfulness: “¹⁰ Bring all the tithes into the storehouse so that there will be food enough in my Temple; if you do, I will open up the windows of heaven for you and pour out a blessing so great you won't have room enough to take it in!” God not only promises a restored relationship but also an abundance of crops and livestock, protected from pestilence, predators, and disease. Why wouldn't they tithe?

The New Testament does not specify a tithing amount, only the instructions to demonstrate an attitude of generosity to those in need, like the money, time, and energy we give to our Missions Budget, Sandwich Team, and Food Mission. Jesus teaches us in Luke, rather, about the spiritual attitude of confidence and generosity that God provides what is needed. That is a theme throughout the Greek Scriptures: abundance, there was more than what was needed to feed the five thousand (there were baskets of leftovers!) In Luke, Chapter 12, Jesus is teaching against all kinds of greed with a warning that simplicity and minimal possessions are preferred. He shares the parable of the foolish man who built larger and larger barns in which to store his excess but could not take anything with him when he was called to heaven that night. To what end was his useless gathering?

Jesus explains why we are not to worry about our possessions. Life is more than acquiring food or clothing. As we studied this summer,

having a right relationship with God, Jesus, the Holy Spirit, and other human beings we love are deeper rewards of a fulfilling life. Placing concern for our daily needs in God's hands is part of what it means to have relationship with God. Are you spending wasted time worrying about the future, or our economy? I do get it that we worry about our children, grands, and great-grandchildren, our world, nation, and civilization, but is that helpful?

Storehouse comes up again in this passage too. Ravens are scavenger birds; they do not store up anything to eat but rely on creation and God to provide for their needs. Lilies of the field in this passage refer to the scarlet anemone flowers that grew on the hills of Palestine in Jesus' day, that only bloom for one day in that desert but are so beautiful. Humans did not plant them, yet their beauty is God's gift.

Do we trust God to provide for our basic necessities, or are you one who stocks up at a super discount store just in case? Our Bee Thrifty bin fills up quickly because many neighborhood families are discovering the calm and extra time they recover by removing excess possessions. Seriously, can we let go of some things and better utilize our resources of time, talents, and tithes? Excess material possessions require dusting, maintenance, containers, and space. Or we waste precious time searching for that thing you know you have but it is in a box three rows deep in the garage or basement! I am recommitted to dealing with the emotions attached to my stuff; is the church ready to do that too? If we can use something for current or a new ministry then we should keep it, but if it's torn, broken, or years out of style, we should repurpose, trash, or donate.

Military and missionary families are particularly good at purging with discernment. I struggle but am getting better at it. The new library book I'm reading (so that I don't buy more books!) is called "Uncluttered Faith: Own Less, Love More, and Make an Impact in Your World" by Joshua Becker, a former pastor and now professional organizer and writer. He uses Jesus' teachings to explain his and his family's repentance from overspending, image impulse buys, and to reinforce his minimalist lifestyle. It jumped off the New Non-Fiction shelf for me and tied well into Stewardship. Now some of you may not agree with the concept of minimalism and I believe that can also be extreme, but we have a national problem with hoarding and overspending; just count the storage units along your commute or coming to church. Are we too robbing God of our tithes with a monthly fee to hold on to stuff? Do we not trust him to provide for our needs? God promises showers of blessings upon us if we trust him, especially with the stewardship of our belongings and income. The church has practices in place to wisely utilize all that you give. I was reminded last week that even our overhead expenses allow us to do the ministry God has called us to do; why be frugal with that? God has provided; and God will provide all we need to carry out his mission (it might be through you). He has promised! I believe and have seen it. Let us hold each other accountable and encourage one another in these financial matters so that we can do even more ministry here in our region and beyond in the world. Amen? Amen! ||

Please pray with me: Thank you Lord for the guidance you give us through your Scriptures each week. May we never forget that you have called us into relationship first, service second, and glory last. Help us to stay close to your word. Transform our hearts and habits, Lord, to be

good stewards with our resource blessings and to remember your promises, sharing them with others. Keep our eyes upon you and your mission; guide our steps. We pray these things in Jesus' name, Amen.