

A STEWARDSHIP SERMON
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A sermon preached at Valley Presbyterian Church
in Brookfield, Connecticut
on May 8, 2022

Texts: Psalm 23 & Acts 9:36-43

Psalm 23

The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.
He maketh me to lie down in green pastures; he leadeth me beside the still waters;
he restoreth my soul.
He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.
Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil:
for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff – they comfort me.
Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies:
thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over.
Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life:
and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

Acts 9:36-43

Now in Joppa there was a disciple whose name was Tabitha, which in Greek is Dorcas. She was devoted to good works and acts of charity. At that time she became ill and died. When they had washed her, they laid her in a room upstairs. Since Lydda was near Joppa, the disciples, who heard that Peter was there, sent two men to him with the request, "Please come to us without delay." So Peter got up and went with them; and when he arrived, they took him to the room upstairs. All the widows stood beside him, weeping and showing tunics and other clothing that Dorcas had made while she was with them. Peter put all of them outside, and then he knelt down and prayed. He turned to the body and said, "Tabitha, get up." Then she opened her eyes, and seeing Peter, she sat up. He gave her his hand and helped her up. Then calling the saints and widows, he showed her to be alive. This became known throughout Joppa, and many believed in the Lord. Meanwhile he stayed in Joppa for some time with a certain Simon, a tanner.

My family and I live in the woods. Our house is surrounded by rocks and trees, and there's all kinds of critters out there: deer, foxes, coyotes, owls, turkeys, woodpeckers. I think I even saw a bobcat once. We moved there coming up on four years ago, and at the time neither of our kids was real excited about it. They kept complaining about living in "the boonies," even though the house is only five minutes away from downtown Mystic. But they came around pretty quickly and eventually grew to love it as much as my wife and I do. It's very peaceful. It feels like our own little sanctuary. And

yet, the funny thing is, we don't feel like we own any of it. We don't feel like the woods belong to us.

We feel like they've passed into our hands for what's really just a brief moment compared to how long they were there before we arrived and how long they'll be there after we're gone.

We feel like what we are is stewards—people who've been entrusted with something, like the shepherd in Psalm 23, who's been entrusted with the sheep. That's really how we've come to think of it. We don't see the woods as our "property" so much as a little corner of creation we've been given the responsibility of caring for until that responsibility is handed on to someone else.

And it's actually a pretty good deal because we get back far more than we give. For the price of raking leaves in the fall and trimming back a few branches, we get to watch the sunset through the trees every evening. We get to see all kinds of wildlife. We get to enjoy peace and quiet—at least when the foxes aren't screaming their heads off.

So in case the title didn't give it away, and you're sitting there wondering—yes, this is a stewardship sermon. I realized this week that I've actually never preached one of these at Valley before, and I bet none of you have a problem with that. I haven't heard any complaining. No one's been pounding on my door, asking me to please, please, please talk about stewardship. To be honest, most pastors aren't crazy about stewardship sermons either. We usually preach one a year, during the annual fall pledge drive, when we can't put it off any longer. The truth is, we feel awkward getting up and talking about budgets and money and asking people to give.

That's a shame because stewardship is about so much more than money. It's really about how we see the church and what kind of relationship we have with it. It's really about understanding that we don't own this place, it's not "ours," but it has been entrusted to us. We've been given the responsibility of caring for it until that responsibility is handed on to someone else.

Which is actually a pretty good deal because we get back far more than we give. For the price of participating in whatever way we can, we get to be part of something bigger than ourselves. We get to make a difference in the community within and beyond these walls. We get to help others grow in faith, hope, and love.

I know it doesn't always seem that way. The fact is, church life is pretty mundane most of the time. Committee meetings. Coffee hours. Bible studies. But all those little moments add up. All those little offerings of ourselves enact God's goodness and generosity.

Think about Tabitha, the woman in the reading from Acts. She was known for the “good works and acts of charity” she did during her lifetime, which were nothing fancy or earth-shattering. She didn’t perform any miracles. She made clothing for widows. She was like the group of ladies in one of the churches I used to serve. They’d get together once a month in the fellowship hall, drink coffee, gossip, and knit prayer shawls that the deacons would deliver to people in nursing homes. They weren’t saving the world, but they were touching the lives of people who were sick and in many cases feeling forgotten. They were letting those people know God was with them, and they were remembered and valued and loved.

Which is exactly what Tabitha did. And when she dies, it’s a real blow to the community. The church sends messengers to go get Peter and bring him back to the house where Tabitha’s body is laid out for viewing. When he arrives, all the widows are standing around weeping, and they’re all wearing the clothes Tabitha made for them. It’s heart-breaking. You can see how much she meant to those women and to that whole congregation. In fact, I don’t think it’s a stretch to say she probably had as much impact as Peter. Raising Tabitha from the dead is certainly an impressive act of faith, but so is a lifetime of quiet, humble service.

And who’s to say which one is more important in the eyes of God—which is maybe the point of the story. Peter and Tabitha were both faithful stewards and good shepherds. Both had been entrusted with the spiritual lives of their fellow believers, and both lived up to that responsibility by giving what they had to give.

So now I can say I’ve preached a stewardship sermon at Valley, and it’s not even the annual fall pledge drive. It’s Mother’s Day. Which may seem like an odd combination, but it actually makes perfect sense. What is a mother if not a steward—someone who’s been entrusted with the life of a child and given the responsibility of caring for them and raising them?

So I just want to say happy Mother’s Day to all of you out there who fit that description in whatever way, shape, or form—mothers, step-mothers, foster mothers, grandmothers, birth mothers, adoptive mothers, married mothers, single mothers, and women who are simply like mothers to someone they know. Thank you for everything you do. I hope you all have a wonderful day.

I also want to say thank you to all the amazing stewards we have in this church—all of you who give what you have to give to Valley, whether it’s your time, your energy, your creativity, your vision, your prayers, your labor, your wisdom, your friendship, and, yes, your money. All of it makes a difference. All of it is important. And all of it is appreciated. I’ve been in enough churches to know how special this place is. And that’s because of you. Amen.