

Stewardship: Freedom and responsibility.

Mordicai told Queen Esther that she was born for such a time as this. God placed her as queen of Persia to save her people from annihilation. Each one of us has been born for the time and place we are in tonight/today. We live in a country where we are free. Free to live, love, and laugh and joy all that God has created. This month our sermons are focusing on stewardship. Is stewardship showing God's love in practical ways? Last Saturday you heard Pr. Curt share with us, Jesus the teacher. Jesus taught truths through the experiences of people, with authority within the communities he visited. He used history and humor to reach the people in an enthusiastic and urgent manner. Jesus was not afraid to be a rebel. His ideology was revolutionary. Last Sunday morning, Jim helped us to think about stewardship as an opportunity to be stewards of God's love.

What I hope to add this morning/evening is another perspective. For me, stewardship is a way of life that is a compilation of the fruit of the spirit. In Galatians 5:22 we learn that love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control are given to those who belong to Christ Jesus.

Freedom is something that I take for granted. And I consider myself a fairly responsible person. Over the past several weeks, I have seen 3 movies that were graphic depictions of persons who had no freedom. They were Valkyrie, Defiance and Slumdog Millionaire.

As we all know, the absence of freedom can bring out either the best or the worst in people.

In Valkyrie, men who were opposed to the horror of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Reich, carried out a plan to assassinate Hitler. It failed and they all lost their lives proving that not all Germans bought into the evil of Hitler's regime. In Defiance, also during WWII, three brothers whose parents were murdered by the Germans, went into the forests of Belarus. They formed a resistance group to provide an opportunity for Jews to find safety and freedom, meager as it was. Over 1200 men, women and children were saved.

Slumdog Millionaire was the hardest to watch. It is about parentless street children in India. As the contestant was given the questions on the TV show Who Wants to Be a Millionaire, he revealed the atrocities he had experienced as a child which gave him the knowledge to answer the questions. Each of these 3 stories showed the human spirit's need for freedom and responsibility for such a time as they were born for.

In our OT lesson, we heard Isaiah tell us, the Judeans in exile had a reason to be hopeful: the one who would bring them to freedom is the God who created the world and gave strength to those who were weary. The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. And those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength, they shall run and not be weary and they shall walk and not faint!

Paul then continues his careful argument about the freedom of God's people. In Christ we are free not to injure one another, but to help. Using his own work as an example, Paul argues that we are not so much free **from** each other as free **for** each other.

Mark showed us that everywhere Jesus goes, many people expect him to set them free from oppression. Everywhere he goes, he heals them and sets them free. The forces that diminish human life are rendered powerless by Jesus.

All that I do and say reflects what I believe. If I belong to Jesus I have a responsibility to be patient, kind, generous and have self control. I am obligated to live, even though I am a sinner, as close to the examples that Jesus showed us as possible.

A few weeks ago, we went to a very nice restaurant and enjoyed the friendship of long time friends. We had an incredible meal; exquisite beef tenderloin, melt in your mouth sweet potatoes and my favorite creamed spinach; the service was excellent. As you know in today's culture, we were expected to tip our wait staff 20%. If the service had been less than satisfactory, we would only have been expected to leave a 5-10% tip.

Last week I had a little accident with my daughter's car. As I was coming home from dropping my grandson at school, something knocked off the side view mirror on the passenger side. The next day I had to take the car in to replace the mirror. The cost of the

part was \$250 and the labor was \$150. I had no choice about the cost of the labor.

What then is the debt I owe for the cost of Jesus' death on the cross? Is it 20% of all that I have or an hourly fee for service? God gave all that he had for me when he sent Jesus to earth to live and to die for me. How then can I live my life to give him what I owe?

Because everything I have belongs to God, I first should give him thanks and praise for all that I have. Next I should give generously. I can give generously because God has given generously to me. The Bible tells me that I should give to God in proportion to how I have been blessed. How do I judge? By my family, by the opportunities I have had for employment, by my friends, by my health, by being born in America the land of the free?

Once I have figured out how to give generously, I need to give willingly. Throughout history there are many stories of kings collecting money from people by force. I guess we can say we pay our income taxes each year for the freedom we enjoy as Americans because if we don't we will be in trouble. Well maybe, according to recent news, not all of us. I must admit I don't get as much joy out of sending a check to the IRS as I do when I write my check each month to LCM.

When I was growing up one of Pepsi's most popular commercials was the Pepsi Challenge. The challenge was to a taste test between Pepsi and Coke. They believed that if you would be willing to give Pepsi a

try, you would find that you liked it better. In Malachi Chapter 3, God introduces the tithe challenge. "Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this, says the Lord Almighty and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you will not have room enough for it." God says "test me."

This does not mean that God will make us rich if we give 10% of all that we have. What it does mean is that the 90% we have left will be sufficient to meet our needs, not our greeds. Learning about needs and wants has helped me when I go shopping, I am able to ask myself is this a want or a need. Sometimes I am able to deny a want.

Every one of us has a talent that we are good at and enjoy doing. Some of us even earn a living with that talent. Our talents are God given and therefore we have a responsibility to give back to God using those talents. Giving of our time is closely linked with our talent. Everything takes time. We must be able to carve the necessary time out of our busy schedules to give time to the ministry of our faith community.

That can be done by teaching Sunday school, helping with the Walk In Ministry, answering phones in the Church office, sending out the newsletter, serving on the council, shoveling snow or picking up litter in the yard, recycling paper and plastic. Each of us can find some way that we can serve God by doing something to show God's love to people, the earth and all of God's creation.

God is calling us by the freedom we have in him, to be good stewards of all that God created and specifically all that God has given to each of us.

God says we should treasure our time as a valuable commodity; every day is so precious. To realize the value of one year, ask a student who has failed a grade. To realize the value of a month, ask a mother who has given birth to a premature baby. To realize the value of an hour, ask a businessman whose flight was delayed an hour and he missed an important meeting. How valuable is one minute? Ask the man who had a heart attack in a restaurant and an EMT was sitting at the next table and how CPR saved his life. Ask the person who barely missed a head on collision with an oncoming car the value of a second. Ask the value of a millisecond to a swimmer who missed qualifying for the Olympics by six-tenths of a second.

Our culture is radically changing before our eyes. We need to be ready with the Gospel of Jesus Christ. We have been set free in Christ. As Paul became a servant to all, he was able to bring more to know and love Christ, we too must become servants and stewards of all we have. Billy Graham is quoted as having said, "Time is the capital that God has given us to invest. People are the stocks in which we are to invest our time, whether they're blue chips or penny stocks or even junk bonds."

Time, talent and treasure are God's precious gifts to us. May God work in our hearts to change our lives to live his gift of freedom for such a time as this.

