**Faithful Stewards of God’s Grace**

**Sermon – Week 2**

**“Serve one another”**

**Text: Luke 10:25-37**

God’s grace, his mercy, and His peace are yours through our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, and I pray He opens our hearts and minds as we hear His Word. We are in week two of our stewardship emphasis, “Faithful Stewards of God’s Grace.” The text for today is the Parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37).

(read the parable)

It was a cool May morning. I opened my garage door to the sun drying up the morning dew. At my side were my trusted garden tools, a bit used, but familiar and strong. The wheel barrel contained a few bags of dirt, strawberry plants and one bag of America’s finest farm fertilizer. I was ready to work, to plant strawberries, and more than ready to reap my reward come next spring. Why all this work for some strawberries, especially when it would be easier for me to just go the grocery store and buy some without getting my hands dirty?

I don’t go to the store because I enjoy working the earth. I also see in my hobby a distant echo of God’s original design for mankind. In Genesis we read first that, *“then the Lord God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life*.” Michelangelo’s painting on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel portrays this event in a very vivid way. He paints Adam still lying in the newly created earth reminding us that mankind is bound to the earth because we come from the earth. Yet, we are also more than dirt. As the finger of God, which has just formed mankind, touches Adam and breathes into him the breath of life we receive our immortal souls. As a creature of both heaven and earth mankind stands in a special relationship both with God and with creation.

We then read in Genesis 2:15 that, “*The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it.”* Adam was created with a purpose and in the beginning that purpose was to tend the earth and all its creatures. Even now, despite our sinful nature, we still fulfill God’s design as we each follow our own vocations in life. Whether we are famer, factory worker, businesswoman, fireman, solider, husband, wife, father, mother, child, pastor or layman we each continually use our God-given gifts and abilities in service to each other and to creation itself. In doing so, God’s continual preservation of the home, church and community continues through us.

Sadly, this perfect connection was lost to sin as Adam and his children become slaves to sin, death and the power of the devil. The creation, which before the fall was under Adam’s dominion, now rebels against him, just as he has rebelled against God. From now on Adam would have to scratch out an existence among thorns and thistles. Yet, God still cares for Adam and his descendants by providing their daily bread, and promising to provide the Seed that will one day destroy sin, death and the power of the devil. In Christ Jesus all this was fulfilled.

This is why Paul writes in Gal 5: 13-15 “*You, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh[a]; rather, serve one another humbly in love. For the entire law is fulfilled in keeping this one command: “Love your neighbor as yourself*.” The freedom that Paul speaks to us comes to us through Jesus Christ who is the promised Seed.

In Christ our old sinful nature has been put to death. Paul writes in Romans 6: 6-7, “*We know that our old self was crucified with Him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. For one who has died has been set free from sin”*. What does a life freed from our old sinful self-look like? Paul again helps us understand our life as stewards by saying, “…*present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewal of your mind…. For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another”* (Roman 12:1-2; 4-6).

These and many other passages demonstrate that God is recreating His people and restoring us in and through Christ. Dietrich Bonhoeffer once said, “*When Christ calls a man, He bids him come and die”.* Luther writes in The Freedom of a Christian, “*Although the Christian is thus free from all works, he ought in this liberty to empty himself, take upon himself the form of a servant, be made in the likeness of men, be found in human form, and to serve, help and in every way deal with his neighbor as he sees that God though Christ has dealt with and still deals with him.” “I will therefore give myself as a Christ to my neighbor*.” Luther says later in that same section, “*just as Christ offered himself to me; I will do nothing in this life except what I see necessary profitable, and salutary to my neighbor, since through faith I have an abundance of all good things in Christ*” (LW 31: 366-367).

Who is my neighbor? Jesus was once asked that question long ago. His response has helped shape the church’s mission. The actions of the Good Samaritan in Jesus’ parable found in Luke 10 show us God’s compassionate heart for sinners. We have all felt the blows of sin in our lives. We have all felt as if life has just left us for dead by the side of road. Sadly, so many of us have watched as family and friends step over or walk on by when we needed them the most. Adam’s fall from glory has left us all by the side of road hurting and dying in some way or another.

Yet, our Good Samaritan, Jesus, has come to help us. His life, His cross, His death, His resurrection are the bandages and medicine that we needed. He paid the price and in Him we find healing for our home, church and community. Luther says that “when I have this righteousness within me, I descend from heaven like the rain that makes the earth fertile. That is, I come forth into another kingdom, and I perform good works whenever the opportunity arises. If I am a minister of the Word, I preach, I comfort the saddened, I administer the sacraments. If I am a father, I rule my household and family, I train my children in piety and honesty. If I am a magistrate, I perform the office which I have received by divine command. If I am a servant, I faithfully tend to my master’s affairs” (LW 26:11-12.). Or simply, we love and serve one another in the name of Jesus who has loved and served us.

The Apostle Paul wrote, *“So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith”* (Galatians 6:10). God’s love transforms our mindset from wanting to please ourselves to a desire to serve others. Seeing others as our brothers and sisters in Christ helps us follow God’s command to love our neighbors as ourselves (Mark 12:31). We are urged to be imitators of Christ (Ephesians 5:1) Being like Jesus, we will serve the hungry, handicapped, and helpless. We love, serve, because Jesus first loved, served us.

Spring will come again, and it will be time to prepare the ground for more strawberries. As I tend to these tender plants, I continue to be reminded of the dirt from which I came from. I remember and confess my sins as I pull weeds. As the berries grow and ripen, I thank Jesus for his continual care for me in this life.

Jesus asked, “*Which of these three, do you think, proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?” [The expert in the law replied], “The one who showed him mercy.” And Jesus said to him, “You go and do likewise*” (Luke 10:36). I think of these words as I share a sweet bowl of strawberries with family and friends enjoying the smiles that all my work has brought. I think to myself, this must be what Jesus sees whenever we His children serve each other, when we take what His grace and, in Christian love and mercy, give it away. My Christian friends, what a wonderful way to live. Serving each other just as our Savior has served us. Truly it is a blessing to *“go and do likewise.“* In Jesus name, Amen.