

## **“Wait for the Lord”**

### **Psalm 31:21-24**

Our October stewardship emphasis is “Live Courageously”. At first stewardship might lead us to picture the exact opposite of courage. Isn’t stewardship about good management, preservation, and limited risk? In the financial planning world, that is what first comes to mind, In your first meeting with a financial planner, you are likely to take an assessment to gauge your risk tolerance, and only then will your planner work with you to develop a diverse portfolio with a mix of stocks and bonds precisely chosen to balance risk with return on investment. And as we move toward retirement, we minimize risk to play it even safer in order to preserve the nest egg we have worked so hard to build.

But that is not exactly the stewardship metaphor we get through scripture. In Matthew 24:14-30, Jesus offers us the Parable of the Talents, and it is the servant who buries his talents, (preserving the principle, mitigating all risk, but sacrificing any return) who is chastised by the master. It was the servants who risked their talents and increased them who were praised and rewarded. Yet, it was less the servants’ economic prowess that the master praised; it was their trustworthiness: “You have been trustworthy in a few things, I will put you in charge of many things” (vs. 21, 23). It seems that living courageously and stewardship are directly tied to trust.

My most significant encounter of generosity and courage was during my first call as pastor. I slowly developed a relationship with one of the elder statesmen of the congregation in North Dakota. I had brief encounters with Joe and began making some personal visits. During one of these visits, I finally asked him how he had become such a generous person.

I admired the ways in which Joe financially supported not only his church, but also many organizations within the community. Joe didn't explain the how or the why of his generosity. In fact, he downplayed my description of him being a generous man. What he did share with me was this: "Well, I don't know about that. What I do know is that I want to be more generous in my death than I have been in life. My children are well and doing just fine. They don't need my money. So I am giving everything away".

This surprised me, to say the least. I had not heard someone speak in this way concerning their accumulated wealth and belongings. I was young, married, about to become a first time parent, and in my first call as a pastor being paid \$1,000 a month plus a parsonage and utilities. I could not fathom such generosity as I considered my own financial burdens. We were paying Danette's student loan payments from college and had bought a new car. After a moment of silence and with a disarming smile, this gentle and generous statesman asked me, "How about you? How is your stewardship?" Thus began my personal financial stewardship journey.

To this day, I am grateful to God for placing Joe in my life. Through this relationship and through his humble and courageous influence, I began my financial stewardship commitment with regular giving. It took courage for Joe to ask a simple and yet life-shaping question. I believe it also took great courage to ask that question of me, his pastor! It was his generous spirit and non-judgmental personality that made the difference. I believe Joe was used to open my ears to listen to God. More important, God the Holy Spirit used Joe to open my heart to God and all of what God loves!

And because of Joe, whenever I'm visiting an elderly person who complains that their children are already fighting over their inheritance, I remind the person that their children are doing just fine on their own. I once had a parishioner who decided to give it all away. Some of you might be thinking, "Oh, no, did Pastor tell my father that?"

Too often, I find that our models of stewardship in the church are designed for preservation and limited risk (trust in ourselves) rather than helping Christians to live freely, simply, generously, and courageously (trusting in God). Of course, there is a difference between living courageously and living foolishly. In another of Jesus' parables, he describes the wise man who built his house upon a rock in contrast to the fool who built his house on shifting sand (Matthew 7:24-27). Wisdom comes from building a solid foundation, but there is a difference between standing firm and laying down anchor and refusing to move.

I have been struck over this past year by deadly hurricanes Harvey, Irma, Florence, and Michael forcing millions in the United States to make the choice to abandon their homes and flee as well as by the endless numbers of refugees in countries like Syria that must make the even more difficult choice to leave their homeland in the face of terrifying war. Marie Marvin's sister is the director at the Hope Center at 150<sup>th</sup> & Triskett where we took two rocking chairs and encountered refugee families from Syria, Nepal, and other Middle Eastern and Asian countries. It often takes more courage to leave home than to stay. Even when home is no longer safe or comfortable, residing in the familiar is preferred. Thank God for places like the Hope Center for Refugees and Immigrants.

And in the midst of danger and tremendous change, our faith calls us to "be strong, and let your heart take courage" (Ps 31:24). The Israelites knew something about being refugees.

Like so many psalms, Psalm 31 was written to ask God to deliver God's people from their enemies.

And alongside their cries for deliverance, they proclaimed that in such a precarious situation, they would seek refuge in the Lord. Even as refugees, they knew where their hope rested.

Of course, the Israelites did not pretend that it was easy to be strong and take courage in the midst of what they faced, but they continually reminded themselves that it was possible for "all who wait upon the Lord" (Ps 31:24). This phrase, "wait upon the Lord," is repeated all throughout the Old and New Testaments, and because we find it so often, I think we might overlook its significance. Waiting can have a very passive connotation – sitting back and not doing anything until it is our time. Yet that is not what God's people mean by being called "to wait upon the Lord". Psalm 31 is a cry to God for God's help, but it also proclaims a trust in God's promises that leads to action. Waiting upon the Lord is to live expectantly, trusting in God's character and promises, and setting out to get our hands dirty. We trust in what has been said about what God would do, and this is an active trust that calls us to be an active steward of the future of God's kingdom.

And certainly one way that we can be an active steward of the future of God's kingdom is by actively joining with God in baptizing our children into God's family.

Sharon Filipic creates all the butterflies hanging on the banner until our children are ready to begin pre-school Sunday School.

Our Ladies of the Yarn create our baptismal blankets.

Dave Worsencroft creates a new version of the baptismal box every two years when he delivers a new supply. This is the first one of his newest edition with a beechwood box and an oak top.

Victoria and Shane have done a wonderful job of keeping up with Dave, creating a new child every two years – Grayson – 6, Kate – 4, Lana – 2, and Keegan – 6 months. The blessing of 4 children and 4 different versions of baptismal boxes. I have a strong feeling there will be a fifth version adorning the Lister home right on schedule!

So, when we are living courageously, stewardship calls us to do good, be generous, and be ready to share so that we might “take hold of the life that is really life” (1 Tim 6:18-19). But living as Timothy suggests in the midst of the world in which we live takes great courage. If we limit our theology of stewardship merely to how we invest our money and possessions, then we have missed the message. God has chosen to work through us to transform this world; therefore, God calls us to steward this ultimate kingdom vision. Such an active and courageous stewardship will force us to live differently, and we will likely have to engage personally, politically, and publicly.

Stewardship, therefore, is not merely a church word associated with fundraising, pledging, and annual budgets. Stewardship is a theological word that leads us to cling to God’s promise for the future, to announce that vision to the world, and to live into this vision by working for that change right now. When living courageously, we can wait expectantly upon the Lord, risking the safety and comfort of the status quo for the chance to live into the role that God calls us to play in the ongoing creation, redemption, and transformation of this world.

May the peace of God . . .

#793 – Be Thou My Vision