

StewardCAST

A monthly e-newsletter of LCMS Stewardship Ministry

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Exiled Stewards



Even when the stewards failed, they were never released from the task of stewardship.

For many years there was a fear among pastors and steward leaders of talking about stewardship. The fear was that it might lead to exile. Viewed as the “third rail” of pastoral practice, if one brought up the topic the anger of the hearers could become so virulent that it might end with a pastor on the way out; not unlike the way Adam and Eve were sent packing from the Garden after the first stewardship crisis (aka the fall into sin).

A thorny task

It is this exile from the Garden that serves as the core of the issue that humanity has

with stewardship. The office of steward was instituted in creation. Made in the image of God, Adam and Eve were tasked with reflecting the love and care of the Creator within creation. Even when the stewards failed, they were never released from the task of stewardship. Search Genesis 3 in the Hebrew text and one will never find a clause that releases the fallen stewards from their stewardship. All that is found is the truth that is lived out in the lives of stewards even today: Stewardship is hard work!

Stewardship is also carried out in a world that is no longer in harmony with the exiled stewards. The ground, which before had

automatically produced without the effort of the steward, now actively worked against them. Thorns and thistles grew. Vegetation like this inflicts pain and suffering on the body, while the labor to remove it wears the body down, until the stewards return to the dust from which they were taken. Even the gift of new life to stewards would come through pain, and, up until recent history, would be the single greatest cause of death for would-be Eves. Pain and suffering, foiling and failure are the marks of this exiled stewardship. A surface reading of it makes it sound unpleasant. A lifetime living it only confirms this painful reality.

Is it any wonder that those created to be stewards do not particularly like to hear about it? Teaching of stewardship is nothing other than a reminder of failure to so many. Stewards wearing sin-corrupted flesh daily sin much. The steward so readily takes things or people, created good, and turns them into false gods. No one likes to be reminded that they fail. No one likes to be called to repentance. It is far more pleasurable to be told of our accolades and accomplishments. Too bad Isaiah describes the most faithful stewardship as unclean, filthy rags, unfit for the Lord's presence and service.

A glimpse of Eden

But man and woman were created to be stewards. The situation in which stewards finds themselves may make stewardship more or less desirable, but it does not change the identity of the steward. A rusty

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**“It takes
 effort, but
 the task at
 hand can
 be done
 faithfully.”**

hammer is still a hammer.
 A dull saw is still a saw.
 It may take more work,
 but the task at hand can
 be done. Being an exiled
 steward does not mean
 that the Christian is not
 a steward. It takes effort,
 but the task at hand can be
 done faithfully.

The first step in this process is to come to
 grips with the truth that the steward is in
 exile. The world in which the steward lives is
 not their ultimate destination. The steward
 labors in a world that looks and feels far
 more like Babylon than the Promised Land.
 But this is where the Lord has placed His
 stewards. Using created things, the steward
 is to reflect the love of the Creator within the
 fallen world. This is done by using created
 things to point the fallen world to the only
 thing worth stewarding: The Gospel of Jesus
 Christ. The Christian steward is a steward
 of a community within a community. The
 church is a little bit of Eden placed within
 the realm of the fallen world.

The community of the church is defined
 not by the world, but by the marks of a
 much greater reality. Word and Sacrament
 create sacred time and sacred space within a
 world that is far from holy and wholesome.
 The steward in the local congregation is
 stewarded by this weekly Gospel presence.
 Called to repentance and faith by the Word,
 washed and renewed by a return to the font
 in Holy Absolution, fed and nourished
 by Christ's very body and blood, the

steward is restored within
 the community of the
 redeemed. In the Divine
 Service, the exile gets a
 glimpse of home. The
 curtain is pulled back. The
 blessings bestowed upon
 stewards by the Lord who
 made and redeemed them

are rehearsed. The peace of heavenly rest is
 given, even if it is just for an hour a week.

But faithful stewardship is never a call to
 asceticism. Faithful stewards live out their
 lives as exiles within the fallen world. Land
 is bought. Marriages happen. Children are
 raised. The peace of the greater community
 is sought in prayer because that is when
 the steward finds peace (see JEREMIAH 29).
 The inner community of the church lives as
 stewards to show the outer, passing-away
 community something far greater than what
 they have. In this stewardship led by the
 Holy Spirit, other lost souls are shown the
 way home.

Pastors and steward leaders, you cannot be
 exiled any more than you already are. Lead
 and teach like the faithful prophets did in
 Babylon. Like Daniel, open your window
 and pray. Teach and lead boldly so that the
 stewards entrusted to your care are led to
 embrace the life of exiled stewards to which
 they have been called. The community of
 the church is positioned to be stewards
 of the Gospel of Jesus Christ for this very
 reason! When God's people live in faith as
 the exiled stewards that we are, God does
 amazing things through us!