

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!