

StewardCAST

A monthly e-newsletter of LCMS Stewardship Ministry

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The Steward's Song: Looking Deeper at What We Sing and Why, PART 2



The Lutheran church has for generations been called “the singing church.” This refers not only to the fact that we sing, but also to what we sing. We have a long heritage of hymnody that not only stirs the soul but feeds and confesses the faith. What Lutherans sing, if it is to be faithful, must flow from what we believe. What we believe can only flow from one source, the Holy Scriptures.

Stewards sing. This doesn't mean that the steward needs to be operatic or a pop sensation. But stewards sing. They sing with their lips. They sing from their soul. The song of praise that comes from a steward's lips flows from the “mercies of God” that St. Paul talks about in Romans 12:1: “I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.”

Giving our first-fruits

Stewardship flows not from the head, heart or hand of the steward. It flows from the mercies of God. In the second verse of the classic stewardship hymn “We Give Thee But Thine Own” (LSB 781), William How rightly describes the posture of the steward. It is not a posture of doing but of receiving:

*May we Thy bounties thus,
As stewards true receive.
And gladly, as Thou blessest us,
To Thee our first-fruits give.*

As Psalm 24 rightly notes, the earth is the Lord's. Nothing belongs to the steward. Everything at the disposal of the steward belongs to God. Stewardship is the free and joyous activity of the children of God and God's family the church in managing all of life and life's resources for God's purposes. God entrusts the created order to the steward. This trust is given for the express purposes of worship of the Lord and the care for the neighbor. The steward can in no way claim ownership of that which is entrusted to him or her. It is received as a blessing so that it might be used in blessing.

The blessing of the steward is in no way deserved. It is grace! Since the Garden of Eden, human history has been marked by the ongoing crisis of stewards idolatrously claiming ownership of that which belongs to God. Daily contrition and repentance,

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worked by the Holy Spirit through faithful reception of Word and Sacrament, leads stewards to realize this. Daily the failed steward is convicted and condemned. But in the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the failed steward is drowned and dies and a redeemed, restored steward is returned to the task of stewarding the treasure of God, the Gospel, in such a way that it can be shared with others.

And the redeemed condition of the steward is what drives us. Not compulsion. Not manipulation. Not merit. Only mercy leads the steward forward in the free and joyous activity of stewardship.

Stewards of an eternal mercy

As those who have been mercied, we know the great need for mercy around us. We turn to the third verse of this hymn:

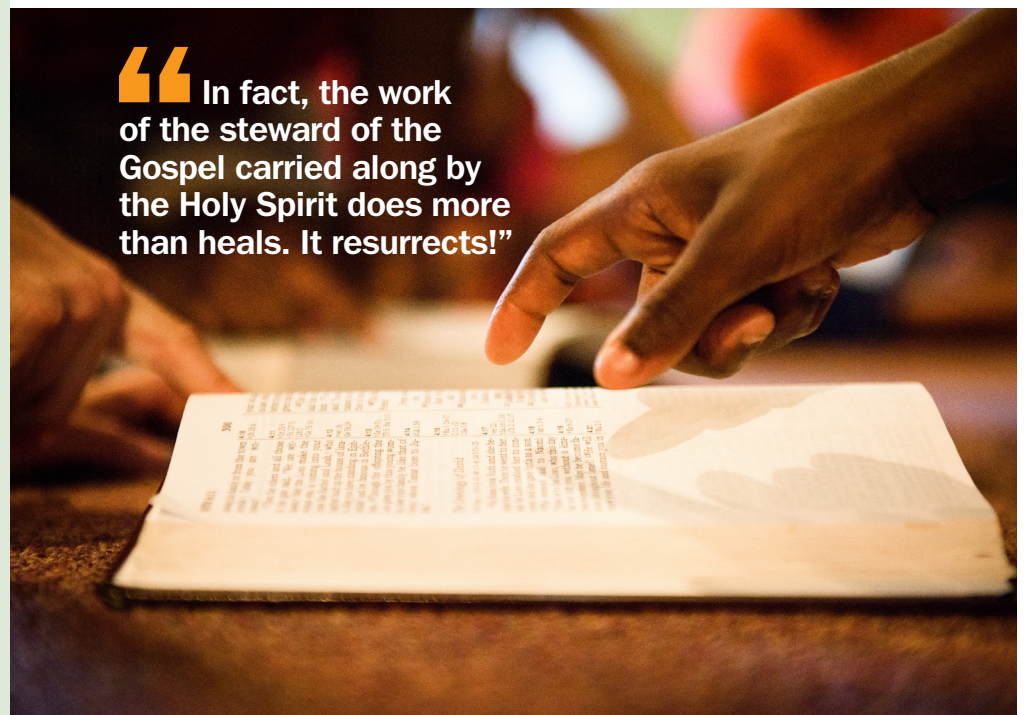
*Oh, hearts and bruised and dead,
And homes are bare and cold,
And lambs for whom the Shepherd bled
Are straying from the fold.*

The steward has only one treasure to steward. That is the Gospel. Money will not mend bruised hearts. Serving will not raise the dead. While the best relief efforts can clothe the naked, feed the hungry and

shelter the homeless, nothing done by the steward can provide for eternity. It is only when the steward, seeing the mercy of God in Jesus Christ poured out on them, in turn pours out the balm of the Gospel on others that true healing takes place. In fact, the work of the steward of the Gospel carried along by the Holy Spirit does more than heals. It resurrects!

Steward leaders have been placed by God to lead their brothers and sisters in Christ to see stewardship in the light of eternal mercy as revealed in Jesus. Godly, biblical stewardship will never be about the effort of the steward. Stewardship that focuses on the effort of the steward will soon become pharisaic self-righteousness. Stewardship that focuses on the Gospel is used by the Spirit in such a way that it sets people free from the bonds of sin and death!

This means that stewardship isn't about the budget. It isn't about preserving the institution of the local congregation or even the Synod. It is about the Gospel of Jesus Christ. It is about how God has in Christ reconciled the world to Himself and has committed to us the ministry of reconciliation. It is this Gospel reconciliation that leads the steward to sing. And this song isn't about what the steward does. The song is about Jesus!



“In fact, the work of the steward of the Gospel carried along by the Holy Spirit does more than heals. It resurrects!”