

Pastor Heidi's sermon from 4/22/18.

The *Dream!* is getting closer!

In just a week, we'll be together – all together in one place. Early service and late service attenders all together. One big happy flock of sheep! The people of God. God's people.

As we've learned more about the *Dream!* we also have learned about biblical stewardship. And when you hear "stewardship" what do you think of? Money. Stewardship is also a churchy word for "fund raising"

But it's not just about money. It's a way of life. And what better day than Earth Day to remind ourselves of that. Stewardship of the earth – taking proper care of God's planet, a gift to us to steward.

Stewardship doesn't stop there. There is also stewardship of our bodies, our families, of the gospel. After the first service a member came up to me and suggested that instead of committees EVERYTHING should be Stewardship of Property, Stewardship of Christian Ed, Stewardship of Faith in Action, Stewardship of Finances. You get the picture.

We, the Dream! Team have been reading *Giving to God: The Bible's Good News About Living A Generous Life* by Mark Allan Powell. Your Dream! Team commends this book to you. If you have picked it up and read it, then you will realize that parts of this sermon take generously from the text. This also serves as one big footnote for this sermon.

And a quick commercial break – this summer in July is Power in the Spirit – a spiritual formation retreat for adults and our keynote speaker? Mark Allan Powell. Can't wait! Information is coming out soon. And, if that's not enough to compel you – David Drebes, pastor and a son of the congregation, heads it up.

Back to the sermon.

Simply put: stewardship means belonging to God. We belong to God. We are God's people. What makes us so? Because God created us. ALL of us.

It is in giving that we participate in a relationship with the God to whom we belong. It is our creator who loves us, guides us, guards us and blesses us.

And the basic principal of stewardship is that everything we are and everything we have belongs to God. This means we own nothing but manage everything. Money. Life. Our Bodies. Creation. Gospel. Everything.

We are stewards. We are not the hired hands. We didn't apply for this job of steward. God appointed us. God CHOSE us.

Perhaps that is why the author of Psalm 23 seems so excited and joyful to announce, “The Lord is my Shepherd.” I shall not want. Resting in green pastures. Drinking calm waters. Table laden with lots of goodies. Oil for my head. Overflowing cup. No fear.

This is an expression of faith. The faith that God has in us to appoint us to such a position. The faith that we can reflect by worshipping the creator, and celebrating the redeemer.

We are redeemed by the one who lays down his life for the sheep. The Good Shepherd. The model shepherd. The beautiful shepherd. The ideal shepherd.

Redemption is a free gift to us. What does it mean to be redeemed? Does it mean that we are to lament with Eeyore-like fashion that oh bother, now we owe God something? Now we’ve also GOT to be his people? The answer is no.

Being God’s people is what redemption is all about. It is salvation. We are saved. And free. Free to live under God’s rule. The rule that protects us, provides for us, guides us. And we belong.

Jesus says, “I am the Good Shepherd” and we are to follow that example. The good news is that we aren’t meant to always be sheep in these stories. If we aren’t the hired hand but indeed the steward, the appointed steward, the one who manages, then we are to manage as Jesus shows us.

And this is a high privilege to be agents of joy, peace and love. That’s how people will know us. They will know we are Christians by our love. There’s a song with that title.

Jesus after the resurrection, sat on the beach with his disciples as described in John 21. He looks to Peter, the one who betrayed him three times, and tells him, “feed my sheep.” Three times. Peter has just been commissioned as a shepherd and to follow the example of the ideal shepherd, the Good Shepherd, Jesus.

Jesus makes God’s love real for us. God’s love is poured out without regard to cost. God’s love is poured out through the sacrifice that Jesus makes, the life that he lays down of his own accord. That is the example that we are to follow. An example of generosity. An example of trust.

We belong to a God that sustains us. Sustains us by giving us everything that we need. Yes, we must carefully plan and prepare and work as best we can.

God sustains by his love for us – flawed as we are. God’s gracious love frees us to love others. This incredible gift of grace and love, the goodness and mercy that follows us all of our days, the cup that always overflows, allows us to be free to pour ourselves out for others without worrying that there won’t be enough love or time or talents or treasures left for ourselves.

And we will live in the house of the Lord our whole lives long.