Genesis 1:27-31; 1 Corinthians 4:1,2; 1 Peter 4:7-11 April 22, 2018

*Stewards for Life*

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It may seem a little odd to spend a couple of these precious weeks after Easter Sunday on the subject of stewardship – but I have had this subject on my mind for months on behalf of our congregation. I am sure that for most of us when we hear the word ‘stewardship’ we think about money. In October or November many churches have what they call ‘stewardship Sunday’ when the challenge is given to households to consider what portion of their income they are giving back to the Lord for the building of the Kingdom. But stewardship is about so much more than money. The biblical notion of stewardship is about trust, is about care, is about sharing, is about building, is about protecting, is about love. It’s about maximizing God’s blessings for His glory! This sermon is a different kind of sermon, but it is what has been on my heart for us, and I hope and pray that is because it is what is on God’s heart for us.

 First let’s read from Genesis 1:27-31: ***27****So God created humankind[*[*a*](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Genesis+1%3A27-31&version=NRSV#fen-NRSV-27a)*] in his image, in the image of God he created them;male and female he created them.* ***28****God blessed them, and God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.”****29****God said, “See, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit; you shall have them for food.****30****And to every beast of the earth, and to every bird of the air, and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food.” And it was so.****31****God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.”*

Maybe lately you have noticed that I have been using the words ‘gathered’ and ‘scattered’ in referring to us as the church. On Sundays we are the *gathered* church, and throughout the week we are the *scattered* church. Sometimes the word scattered doesn’t have a good connotation meaning disorderly, but it is an accurate picture of the church geographically meaning *dispersed*. We are physically together, gathered as the church mostly on Sundays, but for the greater part of the week we are not physically gathered – we are scattered from Three Springs and Orbisonia to Pond Bank and Carlisle, Greencastle to Blain. We are scattered over a very wide area in where we live and where we work throughout the week. Some of us are driving or flying across state lines to work or maybe to visit. But no matter where we are, whether we are gathered or scattered, we are still the church. We are still the church. And the church has been given a mandate to be stewards of the earth – the plants, the trees, the fish of the sea, the sea itself, the earth, and every living thing that creeps upon the earth. How are we doing as a church, gathered or scattered, at caring for, at stewarding what God has entrusted to us when it comes to disposing of things we have used? I can honestly say that as a church we aren’t doing very well.

John and I do pretty well at home because Chambersburg has a fairly good recycling program, and we separate out the plastic and the cardboard and the metal – but here at the church property in Path Valley – it just goes in the dumpster – all the same. And we use a lot of water bottles. We’ve probably all seen the pictures of how plastic water bottles are harming the creatures and marring the landscape that God has given us to steward. So, thus begins a challenge to us to be better stewards as the gathered church (and I hope the scattered as well). I’m praying that God would raise up some folks in our midst who would be recycling leaders, who would help us think it through, and help us follow through to be the best stewards we can be of this beautiful world God has entrusted to us. Let us pray: *Heavenly Father, we confess that we have not been the best stewards that we can be of all you have given to us. We confess we have been lax in caring for this beautiful world. Please help us, guide us, correct us, as we make a new effort to be faithful, trustworthy stewards of what you have given. In Jesus’ name, Amen.* If you are being called to help guide this effort, please come speak with me.

 The next area of stewardship we need to think about as the gathered church is safety. God calls us to be fruitful and multiply. We are to take care of one another and protect one another from harm so that we can be fruitful and expand his Kingdom here on earth. We are all well aware of the violent acts that have taken place in churches and in schools and other public places in these last years. These acts have caused us to make some changes to our building and to our practices when we are the gathered church. We are still in the process of implementing some of those changes.

 It’s difficult, because we all want to go back to those days when all the doors of the church were wide open – never locked. It’s hard to make a decision to lock the church doors. It just seems wrong. But giving someone who wants to cause harm easy access seems wrong too. How do we decide what to do? We pray. We consider the options. We learn. We listen. We watch patterns. We pray some more. Families are called to care for one another. We are family. We are brothers and sisters in Christ right here – gathered together – to worship, to learn, to encourage one another in the faith. We are determined to care for and protect one another from harm. Here are some ways we are doing that.

1. Well over a year ago we determined to keep all doors locked in the building on Sunday mornings except the two doors to the connecting entryway between the sanctuary and the Christian Education building and the sanctuary door. We have cameras on all three doors all the time. In my office, on the tech desk upstairs, and on smart phones we can see what is happening at those doors at any time. From my house in Chambersburg I can see what’s going on at those doorways at any time. The plan is to have 6-8 people keeping an eye on those doorways through the camera app when the church is gathered together. We are in the process of adding two more cameras – one in the far corner of the nursery pointing out towards the door and another at the sanctuary door in the next month or two. If we decide to lock all doors on Sunday mornings, which we do not want to do, but which many churches are doing, we will have people at the doors to open and greet folks as they come in, including latecomers. This is a hard decision. Five of us are attending a church safety seminar next month in Chambersburg which we hope will help us come to a decision that settles well in our souls.
2. All doors are locked during the week. If you have a key, keep it on your keyring so you can get in when you come, or ring the doorbell. Preferably, if you have a key, please bring it and use it.
3. We are having an emergency alarm system installed in the next several weeks from the tech desk and from the nursery. This will be a push-button lanyard system that with the press of several buttons will alert first-responders to come and/or sound a building-wide alarm. We hope we never, ever use it.
4. One of these days we’re going to have some instruction on what we should do in case of an emergency – whether it is a medical emergency, a building emergency like a fire, or an intruder. We need to have an evacuation plan, a plan for where parents would meet back up with their children, and a plan to stop an intruder. How could and should we use the things around us like fire extinguishers, like hymnals, or like weapons that some of us carry regularly?
5. We would like all youth and adults to watch the video “Run, Hide, Fight” for preparedness in case an intruder with intent to harm would come anywhere you are – school, church, at a mall, or a restaurant, etc. If you don’t have access to the internet to watch it at home, we will provide an opportunity to watch it here in the near future at a pre-announced time.

We cannot put our heads in the sand and pretend that these concerns are not our concerns. We are family and we are called to care for, to be stewards of one another. We need to do whatever we can to keep each other safe in every way. Please fill out the yellow questionnaire in your bulletin today to help the safety team know what’s on your heart and mind. Let us pray: *Gracious God, the world we live in is full of people who are desperate, who are angry, and who are determined to harm others – innocent others minding their own business. Please help us as a church to know how to lead, how to protect, how to educate in faith, not in fear. We seek your way and your will and we seek to be peacemakers wherever we may be. This we pray in Jesus’ name, Amen.*

 Now, finally today, I want to read from 1 Peter 4:7-11, *“****7****The end of all things is near;[*[*d*](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1+Peter+4&version=NRSV#fen-NRSV-30436d)*] therefore be serious and discipline yourselves for the sake of your prayers.****8****Above all, maintain constant love for one another, for love covers a multitude of sins.****9****Be hospitable to one another without complaining.****10****Like good stewards of the manifold grace of God, serve one another with whatever gift each of you has received.****11****Whoever speaks must do so as one speaking the very words of God; whoever serves must do so with the strength that God supplies, so that God may be glorified in all things through Jesus Christ. To him belong the glory and the power forever and ever. Amen.”*

Today we’ve thought about being stewards of the earth and stewards of one another’s physical safety as the gathered church. As I wrap up today I want us to think about being stewards of one another’s hearts, and minds, and souls, certainly as the gathered church, but my heart today is for you, in your households, as the scattered church. Why is this on my mind? For many, many reasons, but two in particular.

 As you know John and I went away for our 40th wedding anniversary. We had determined with the Christmas gift you all gave to us that we would save it and use it to take a trip together. It was much needed. It was critically needed. Both John and I work very hard, and because my work is on this side of the mountain and his work is on that side of the mountain, we really don’t see each other very much throughout the week. It seems like our conversations are logistical in content more than they are relational in content. Do you know what I mean? It seems our conversations are more about when to be where, and what to pick up, and who needs what when instead of connecting, relational conversations. That is not ok. We are married. God gave us to each other to love and to cherish one another ‘til death parts us. God has entrusted John’s heart and mind and soul to me as his wife, something I alone on this earth am called to do, and he has entrusted mine to John as my husband. Now, I am not saying that my well-being ultimately depends on my relationship with John or vice versa – my well-being ultimately depends on my relationship with God through Jesus Christ the Lord – but there is a stewardship responsibility here in a marriage that must not be neglected. Anybody following me?

 But let’s go a little further. This also applies to parents and their children. Parents, we are called to steward the hearts, minds, and souls of those entrusted to us, right? How are we doing at that? How are we doing at helping to address the incredible stresses that are on children these days? How are we doing at helping them learn the proper priorities to steward their own hearts, and minds, and souls? How are we doing at providing a home environment that is safe, that is secure, that is stable, and that is soul-building? We are going to talk a whole lot more about all of our responsibility to our children next week, but parents (of children of all ages), remember, they are always watching, always listening, always learning from what we are doing or saying. Just because my kids are now 38, 35, and 30 doesn’t mean my role as a faithful steward in their lives is over. What kind of example are we providing? Let’s look one more time at the words from 1 Peter 4, “***11****Whoever speaks must do so as one speaking the very words of God; whoever serves must do so with the strength that God supplies, so that God may be glorified in all things through Jesus Christ. To him belong the glory and the power forever and ever. Amen.”*

 On Tuesday morning at 10:06 a.m., Joyce Burger Treible was released from her worn and broken body and ushered into the presence of her Savior in Heaven. Joyce would have been 82 years old next month. She was married to her husband Wayne for 60 years, the last 20 of which were incredibly challenging because for the last 20 years Joyce was paralyzed from the waist down. The true cause of the paralysis was never definitively determined, but one thing that was definitively determined was Wayne’s devotion to care for this woman whom God had given to him. He was determined to be a faithful steward of her body, her mind, and her soul – as far as it depended on him. They never had fancy equipment, in fact, for most of the years the hoyer lift that he used to get her in and out of bed into her chair was a hand-cranked style. Only in the last several years did he have one that was electric. There were what seemed to be unending obstacles that came against them – whether it was bed sores, infections, cancer, insurance battles, vehicle troubles, surgeries, brief, necessary nursing home stays, you-name-it, so many obstacles. But in the end, as she called out his name in the hospital, he said to her, “I’m here Grammie, right beside you, just where I’ve always been. I’m right here. Can’t you feel me holding your hand?” Stewarding her heart. Stewarding her soul. No matter how hard. We are called to that too – by the great God who created us male and female – who gave us to one another to be fruitful on this earth – to build a kingdom of perfect mercy and perfect justice. To build a kingdom of love and care for one another.

 On the same day that Joyce Treible went to Heaven, Barbara Bush also made her grand entrance. I just love thinking about that. Joyce looking over in the line and seeing the former first lady – knowing that there’s only one thing that opens those ‘pearly gates’ – faith in Jesus Christ – something both women shared in deep and profound ways. Mrs. Bush would have been reunited with her daughter Robin who died in 1953 at the age of 3 of leukemia. I read the following account of that time from an old article in The Washington Post. Think about the stewarding of relationships you hear in this story – husband to wife, wife to husband, parent to child, child to parent.

*“Back in Texas, George W. Bush has recounted the day his returning parents came to pick him up at school in their big green Oldsmobile. He recalled his delight at the prospect of seeing his baby sister [who had been in a hospital in New York for many months]. “I remember seeing them pull up and thinking I saw my little sister in the back of the car. I remember that as sure as I’m sitting here,” “I run over to the car, and there’s no Robin.”*

*Barbara Bush described the death of her daughter and the grief that followed as an agony made more bearable by her relationship with her husband.  Later, she would marvel that the tragedy that splits many couples had brought them closer. “In this case, it tested the marriage and made it stronger.”*

*George W. has said Robin’s death forged a bond with his mother that he leaned on through his father’s presidency and then his own. Each felt responsible for shoring up the other. Barbara Bush described the moment she realized young George was bucking her up. One day … she heard her son tell a friend that he couldn’t come out because he had to play with his mother, who was lonely. “I was thinking, ‘Well, I’m being there for him,’” she recalled. “But the truth was he was being there for me.” “That started my cure,” she wrote in her memoir. “I realized I was too much of a burden for a little 7-year-old boy to carry.”*

 God has given us to one another. We have the privilege and the responsibility of caring for one another’s heart, mind, and soul by our actions, by our words, and by taking care of ourselves (body, mind, and soul). We have to remember that one person’s irresponsibility will become someone else’s responsibility. If I’m not caring for myself as I should (as Mrs. Bush realized), I am being a poor steward of both my own self and those God has given me to steward.

It all comes down to being stewards of the message and the mysteries of the gospel. Jesus didn’t just come back from the dead and parade around like Dolly in “Hello, Dolly!” He met with his disciples. He spoke to them. He fed them. He gave them a great commission. **“Do as I have done. Go. Make Disciples. Baptize. Teach. Obey. Follow my example.”** For over 2000 years that’s what the church has done – both gathered and scattered. Now is not the time to lose our focus. What we do matters, folks. What we don’t do, matters. What we do with our trash. What we do to keep one another safe. What we do in our most important relationships. What we do together to share the truth – the good news about Jesus Christ!

As I was leaving the hospital last Sunday morning, I had tears coming down my face not knowing if I would have another conversation with Joyce here on earth. Wayne grabbed me by the shoulders and said, “Meagan, remember – the BEST is YET to BE!” Oh, how he stewarded my heart, my mind, and my soul in that moment! Yes! He lassoed me and pulled me back to the promises that never fail. Let’s not forget the privilege and the responsibility that we have with and for one another. In 1 Corinthians 4:1 & 2 we read, *“Think of us in this way, as servants of Christ and stewards of God’s mysteries.****2****Moreover, it is required of stewards that they be found trustworthy.”* Amen.