

This is our second week of our stewardship time. In your bulletin you may have noticed a commit card. Let me offer some instructions. Make sure you grab one of our offering envelopes. When you've prayerfully decided what you can do in 2025, fill out the card and put it in that envelope. The counters will be grateful if you designate that envelope as a pledge. When you are ready, drop it in the plate. You can also drop it by the church office during our office hours.

Now as a reminder our stewardship series is called "What's in the stew" Stew referring to being a steward. We're spending the next 3 weeks talking about aspects of being a steward as described by the bible.

Before we start stewing about that, I wanted to share a few things about stew. I tried to come up with a good stew pun, but I ran out of thyme. I'm going to warn you. Stew jokes are meaty-ocre at best, but I hope you will be chuck-ling a little. My pot asked my ladle why a stew joke was so funny. It was a stirring conversation. I was asked about passwords. There's one thing you can't use as a password. Beef stew. It's just not stroganoff. Now this list might be a little long, but I promise it's not a crock.

Last week we looked at what Paul had to say about being a steward. And we learned that as stewards we are responsible for the mysteries, the revelations of God. This week we hear from one of Jesus' disciples, Peter. In his first letter, Peter also mentions the word steward. He says that we are stewards of the manifold grace of God. He surrounds these words with specific gifts that show how we live out being a steward like that.

Listen to the ways we are to do that. We are to engage in serious and disciplined prayer. We are to love one another. There's a prize with this gift. It says that love covers a multitude of sins. We are to be hospitable. Here Peter says there are conditions to giving this gift. No grumbling!

Then Peter throws caution to the wind. He says we are to serve each other in whatever gift each of us has received. With such an open invitation, that leads to the question of what it might mean to serve God.

But think about it. So often, we have only the vaguest idea of what it means to “Serve God.” Sure, most people say they want to “serve” God --but most want to do it in an ADVISORY CAPACITY!” Know anyone like that? Feel like I should hold up a mirror. How do we move from serving in an advisory capacity to really and truly committing to service.

This reminds me of a school and a little boy named Johnny. Johnny had trouble pronouncing the letter “R” His teacher gave him a sentence to practice at home.

“Robert gave Richard a rap in the rib for roasting the rabbit so rare.” (x2)

A few days later she asked Johnny to read the sentence she’d given him. He quickly rattled off the sentence. “Bob gave Dick a poke in the side for not cooking the bunny enough!”

Johnny did all he could to avoid using the letter “R”. That’s how it can be with a commitment to serving the Lord, especially if it is not easy for us to do or we feel inadequate for the task. We might even be afraid.

At the beginning of Chapter 4, Peter talks to the churches about living for God. He says, Jesus did not live his earthly life just for his human selfish desires but rather for the will of God and he says, “You have spent enough time in the past doing what pagans choose to do--living in debauchery, lust, drunkenness, orgies, carousing and detestable idolatry”.

Peter is speaking to people who previously had no IDEA of what it meant to SERVE God. They had previously lived self-centered and destructive lives. He is telling them the importance of living a different lifestyle--one that would count for something in the light of eternity. One that would be productive and point other people to Christ.

I believe that this passage is just as applicable for us today. What can we get out of this passage today? How can we apply it to our lives after we walk out these doors?

First you should know that you are GIFTED--You have been given a gift by God to use in His service. You might be tempted to say, "I don't have any gifts or talents." But that's not what the bible says. And we will dig more into those gifts on World Communion Sunday. You'll find reference after reference in the Bible showing that we've been given at least one and often more gifts for serving God effectively. We may not RECOGNIZE them. Maybe they haven't been developed. We may even discount a gift as one from God because it just doesn't seem that "SPIRITUAL."

In high school I was terrible in math. I just couldn't grasp algebra. I loved reading and writing. Years later I had a chance to start an MBA for free. (never got to finish it) I found myself needing to take both Calculus and Statistics. Big GULP. But somehow suddenly, I could do it. I wasn't top of the class but I by no means failed. My math abilities just hadn't developed yet in high school.

In our Commitment to Serve, let's be on the LOOK OUT for the hidden gifts of God. Don't discount any talent as unimportant." The Bible doesn't lie. You have been entrusted with one or more gifts. You just need to find them and then polish them up and develop them.

Next we need to IDENTIFY our GIFTS--How do we know what we are capable of? How can we know our individual abilities? Why not try praying, studying the scriptures, and thinking about what it is you can do or would like to. Talk to others about your gifts. Has anyone ever said to you. "You're really good at this...You ought to do this....I don't want to alarm anyone, but it was those exact questions that led to me becoming a pastor. Talk about a gift that took a loonggg time to be recognized.

What if you just "tried out" ways of serving God. Volunteer for something short term.

Don't let "what ifs" stop you. Like

What if I fail?

What if I don't like it?

What if I...? (x3)

To get closer to knowing your gifts and abilities, maybe you could start with questions like these”:

- How am I uniquely gifted by the Lord?
- How can my experiences be turned into good advantages in my church family? In my community? In my own family?
- What do I possess that can be used in the work of our church family’s ministries--time, money, a phone, a car, an education?
- What things give me joy when I do them? What’s the one thing that causes time to just fly by? The thing that makes me look at the clock and realize it’s already 4:00 p.m.?

If you honestly ask these questions, and give space to listen, I guarantee you will start coming up with answers. Then you need to ask a few other questions like.

- What things need to be done within our church family. Is there already a ministry that I can plug into?
- What things are being done inadequately or not at all?
- Does a ministry need to be started, and can I start it?
- What problems exist, and how can I contribute to the solution?

Let me offer one other piece of advice. Don’t wait to be asked. If you are wondering if your help is needed...it is. If you’re wondering if you can help...you can. If you are wondering if you have the ability to do it...you do. Please ask. But trust me, if you don’t ask, I will.

Charles Kingsley, a priest in the Church of England said this, “Have your tools ready and God will find you work.” (2x)

Church family members, You are gifted. Identify your gifts. Once you do you will be GOOD TO GO—You will be able to work on our United Methodist Mission. Make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. Say that with me.

You don't have to wait until you can serve PERFECTLY. All you're asked to do is start where you are. All you have to do is serve FAITHFULLY as Peter said in vs 10. "administering God's grace in its various forms. And if you read the rest of this verse you will see a good reason to be confident in your success. It won't be your words you'll be speaking, it'll be God's. It won't be your strength that will give you the ability, it will be God's. As Paul says in Philippians 4:13 "I CAN DO all things through Christ which strengthens me" Say that with me.

Let's not worry about our imperfections, or anyone else's for that matter. Just serve. Just faithfully serve. In serving you will develop your gifts. You are already commissioned. Jesus commissioned you in Matthew 28. You are GOOD TO GO.

What's in the stew today? You are in the stew. You are stewards of the manifold gifts of God. And it's in using our gifts that we live into that most honorable title. With this you are released for ministry--every single one of you.

By what authority are you released? By God's. Peter says in chapter 2:9 "You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light."

Church family....I'm jumping into the stew, how about you?