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In playfully looking at Roz from Monster's Inc. and her combative relationship with her underling, Mike, we are reminded that there are many ways to be "in charge". Some not so good. Being a good steward, being a leader of what God has given us to tend is going to be our focus over the next 4 weeks.

Today we start our stewardship period. This is a time where yes, we will ask for you to make a pledge, a commitment to what you think you can do to help with the finances of the church in 2025. As I was thinking about our approach for this year, I started looking at the definition of the word steward. If you've traveled on an airplane or a cruise ship, you've encountered different types of stewards. Simply put, a steward is a manager. Merriam Webster says it's someone who actively directs affairs.

I moved from a working definition of a steward to wondering what the bible had to say about stewards. I wanted to know what's in the stew! Now, Jesus did tell a parable about bad stewards who tended their master's field. But that says more about what a good steward isn't. I was looking for a definition of a good steward. Thank you, Paul and Peter, for helping here. Today we will look at what Paul has to say about being a good steward in 1 Corinthians chapter 4.

To understand the context of this letter to the church at Corinth, let's do a little bit of backtracking. You see, during Paul's 2nd missionary journey a vision appears to Paul in the night. A man of Macedonia stands pleading with him, saying, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." This change in plans and the direction of his mission trip leads Paul to places like Philippi, Thessalonica, Athens, and then to Corinth. He was in Corinth for 18 months. It is in Corinth that he meets Priscilla and Aquilla. They go with Paul to Ephesus. In Ephesus they meet an "eloquent man" named Apollos, who they bring into the church of Jesus Christ. Apollos goes to Corinth and conducts a powerful ministry there.

That brings us to our present day and this letter that Paul wrote to the Corinthians. It's called I Corinthians but based on what Paul will say in chapter 5 vs 9, there appears to be a letter before this that's been lost. Just a fun fact to throw in there.

At the beginning of this letter Paul mentions news he has received from Chloe's household about divisions in her church. They were arguing. What were they arguing about? Who belongs to whom. Chapter 1 vs 11-12 ...it has been declared to me concerning you, my brethren, by those of Chloe's household, that there are contentions among you. Now I say this, that each of you says, "I am of Paul," or "I am of Apollos," or "I am of Cephas."

In the first 4 chapters Paul will address this split in the body of Christ. These personal allegiances to certain teachers. Apostles like Peter and Paul, and that eloquent teacher Apollos. Paul is emphatic. Everyone is working toward the same goal. Each minister of Christ has a role to play and that doesn't make one better than another. Paul's final words about this topic in chapter 4 make something clear. A minister of Christ is a servant, not a master, They are stewards of the mysteries of God."

Paul is saying, "This is how men should think of us. We are ministers of Christ. We are stewards of the mysteries of God." Enough with divisive statements such as. "I like Apollos—I'm an Apollosite," or "I like Paul—I am a Pauline," or "I like Cephas—I'm a Cephonian."

This is a division that circles around a human teacher. This is pride talking. This is one group thinking they are better than another group. Thinking their "truth" is better than someone else's. Paul is saying this just isn't right. Stop thinking that one teacher is better than another, instead, let's view all true ministers of Christ as ministers or "hupere'tes" of Christ. Huprestes is a Greek word that means under-rowers. Go back to your history of the Vikings. Remember their ships with rows of oars sticking out the side of the ship. On the top deck there would be several rows of men sitting on benches, working at the oars.

If a ship was very large, below deck you would have other rows of men sitting on benches and doing the same thing. These were the under rowers. They had the lowest of low jobs. They

worked under the worse conditions imaginable. According to Paul, true ministers of Christ were not lords, were not masters. They were merely under rowers.

Paul says that these lowly under rowers are the “stewards” of the mysteries of God. This mystery isn’t a mystery in the sense that it is incomprehensible—it’s a mystery because it’s something that our human intelligence could not discover on its own. This mystery comes to us by revelation of God. Which means we are stewards of the great revelations of God.

Paul speaks about a requirement for being a steward. Be found faithful. Being a steward means being responsible. Being responsible demands faithfulness. It demands honesty. It demands our best to give an account of what God has placed in our hands.

Church family. What has God placed in our hands. What are we asked to be faithful to. What are we asked to be stewards of here in Kingman, Arizona. Here are just a few of the responsibilities we’ve taken on.

Every Friday from 9-noon we give out food boxes. This past Friday we served over 20 households. In this past last year, we’ve upgraded that experience. Recipients get a true shopping experience. They get to browse our offerings and pick the things that they want. They aren’t forced to take what they don’t want. They have a personal shopper to guide them. Where we have abundance, they get to take as much as they want. Then they get cart to vehicle service.

For those who need food assistance outside of our food box hours, we offer daily bags. These daily bags offer a protein, chips, water, a fruit cup, and a sweet. We go through about 20 of these bags a week.

Our clothing closet continually provides opportunities for people to upgrade their wardrobe. Just the other day we had someone come in who had lost everything. Our clothing closet helped her get a few outfits to wear. We were a step for her to get on her feet.

We are the home of Grace Neal Preschool. This offers a much needed resource for working families. It offers a stable environment for children whose brain development catapults during these young years. We offer care from birth to Pre-Kindergarten. Good infant care is really hard to come by. I'm proud to be able to say that we offer that. Our preschool is highly ranked and highly in demand in Kingman.

We offer our space to groups who help others beat substance abuse issues. We open our doors to those who are trying to manage weight loss through the TOPS program. People who are interested in gardening have a home here through the Garden Club. Morning Glories is a group that meets at our church and all throughout their season, raise money so they can give \$1000 scholarships to students. Several young members of our church family have received a Morning Glory scholarship.

Church family, stewards, these are just a few of the many responsibilities we bear in this community.

Circling back to the beginning. To the place of the argument between the camps of Peter, Paul, and Apollos. Clearly they were three very different individuals. Each gifted in their own way. Each challenged in their own way. If they'd looked only at their faults, they would not have been able to appreciate their unique ways of approaching the mysteries, the revelations of God.

They couldn't do it on their own, they needed God. Because God ultimately knows the best ways to use us. In spite of our gifts. In spite of our flaws. Sometimes we're so focused on our flaws, we don't take notice of our gifts.

This reminds me of a story about a water bearer. He had two large water pots that he carried on either end of a pole slung across his shoulders. One of the pots had a crack in it. Every day as he carried water to his master's house he arrived with one full pot and one only half full. This went on for several years. The unbroken pot was proud of its accomplishments. The imperfect pot was embarrassed at its failure. It could only accomplish half of what it was made to do.

The pot decided to talk to the water bearer. "I am so ashamed," said the pot. "Why?" asked the carrier. "Because water leaks out all the way to your master's house. Because of my crack I've been only able to deliver half of the load." The water carrier looked kindly at the cracked pot and said, "As we return to my master's house today, I want you to look at the beautiful flowers along the path."

The pot was cheered by the beauty he saw along the way. "Did you notice that the flowers were only on your side of the path?" the water carrier asked. "I've always known about your flaw. I decided to plant seeds on your side of the track. As we walked back each day from the stream, you watered them." I have been able to pick fresh, beautiful flowers for my master's table. Without your being just the way you are, this beauty would not have graced his house."

What's in the stew? This is what is in the stew of stewardship. No matter our strengths, no matter our flaws, we are all equipped to be stewards of God's mysteries. When we are faithful, God can and will take what we have and make it a beautiful gift.

Let us pray.