

**Sermon: Ninth Sunday after Pentecost**  
**Theme: Stewards in the House of God**  
**Text: Luke 12:32-40**

**<sup>32</sup> ‘Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom. <sup>33</sup> Sell your possessions and give to the poor. Provide purses for yourselves that will not wear out, a treasure in heaven that will never fail, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. <sup>34</sup> For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.**

**<sup>35</sup> ‘Be dressed ready for service and keep your lamps burning, <sup>36</sup> like servants waiting for their master to return from a wedding banquet, so that when he comes and knocks they can immediately open the door for him. <sup>37</sup> It will be good for those servants whose master finds them watching when he comes. Truly I tell you, he will dress himself to serve, will make them recline at the table and will come and wait on them. <sup>38</sup> It will be good for those servants whose master finds them ready, even if he comes in the middle of the night or towards daybreak. <sup>39</sup> But understand this: if the owner of the house had known at what hour the thief was coming, he would not have let his house be broken into. <sup>40</sup> You also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him.’**

What’s your first reaction when you hear the word ‘economics?’ I dare say it wouldn’t be all that positive. Endless news about deficit, the stock market, rising interest rates, property prices, and inflation. None of these are particularly cheery topics.

The word ‘economics’ is related to the word, steward. Economics comes from the Greek word for steward, *oikonomos*. The first part of the word means house, and the second part, law or rule. So a steward is a ‘house manager, a person, that is, a slave, given responsibilities to run the household for their master.’ Think of Joseph who rose through the ranks to oversee the whole nation of Egypt, secondly only to Pharaoh himself. The land and everything it contained belonged to Pharaoh, but Pharaoh entrusted the administration of the land to Joseph.



The word ‘steward’ doesn’t just describe someone who fills the kind of role Joseph did. It’s not primarily about what we do with what we have: our time, talents and treasures; it’s all about who we are. We need to begin at the beginning, and ask ourselves the question, “What is the purpose of life?” Once we’ve sorted that out, everything else becomes clear.

In the recent census, an increasing number of Australians said that they had no religion. But whether Christian, atheist, agnostic or adherent of another religion, everyone has a way of making sense of life and determining how they are going to live. People have many ways of answering this question. Some people will say that the purpose of life is all about maximising pleasure. The world is a playground of experiences and things for us to enjoy. Anything that gets in the way of cramping

my style, and the freedom to do anything I want is wrong. These are the tenets of what's called hedonism, and perhaps you see why it's attractive. "Eat drink and be merry" could be the catchphrase.

Related to this point of view is what some have called the therapeutic mindset. The goal in life is to feel peace, and sin is defined as anything that causes us harm, whether emotional or physical. The world is a dangerous place that we must be protected from, so the encouragement is to focus inwards, or to spend time with like-minded safe people.

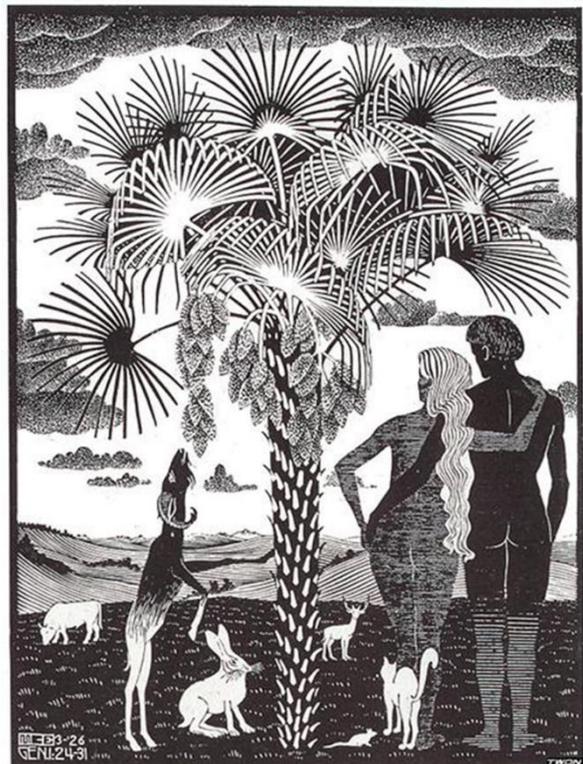
Another increasingly popular life philosophy is moralism. We are all good, and what's wrong in people's thinking and acting can be fixed with education. Prejudice is a sign of ignorance, and faith is almost immoral because it stops people from expanding their thinking and being open to the way of progress.

And finally, there's an increasing number of people who are drawing the conclusion that life is random and largely meaningless. There's no big picture, just a completely messed up world which is getting worse. People are on the take, leaders are corrupt, institutions, including the church, can't be trusted, what's the point. Better to opt out and leave the world to flame out or collapse inwardly.

The Christian writer Mark Sayers observes that there are shards of truth in each one of these life philosophies. The world is messy, and sin is all around. Joy and pleasure are great gifts. There is a right and a wrong way to live. Peace and wellbeing are the most incredible gift. But these truths are sharp and dangerous when they are ripped out of their proper context in God and in his design for a flourishing life. Which takes us back to the beginning.

In Genesis chapter one we find our place in God's world. It's day six, and God has almost finished creating this most incredible universe, from the macro of earth, sea and sky, sun and stars, through to the micro of plants and trees, bird and fish, and other living creatures of all kinds. God speaks creation into being, and his wisdom oversees the incredible beauty and diversity of this world. But he hasn't finished yet. There's his crowning glory.

**"Then God said, 'Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.' So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.**



We owe our existence to God. We only live in relationship to him. We are not self-created, self-willed creatures. We exist to worship God and to bring him honour, by reflecting back to him his image in each one of us. This is the cardinal truth that Luther confession in his explanation of the First Article of the Apostles' Creed:” **I believe that God has created me and all everything that exists.”**

Genesis continues; **“God blessed them and said to them, ‘Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground. “This is where we can trace back the biblical concept of stewardship. God has placed us in the most privileged position, as those who are called to watch over the house of his entire creation. He made it, we didn’t, but he hands it over to us in trust, to bring us pleasure and joy, to marvel at his creative grace and to have thankful hearts for all he has given us. With this privilege comes also our responsibilities toward other people, but also the wider creation for whom God also cares, “the beasts of the earth and all the birds in the sky and all the creatures that move along the ground – everything that has the breath of life in it.”**

It sounds perfect, and it was. But that wasn’t enough for our first parents, Adam and Eve, who bridled at being placed the loving hand of God and wanted to call the shots. The perfection of creation and their place in it was shattered into a thousand pieces. We don’t just know this story historically or theoretically. We play it out in our own lives. The shards of truth in these various life philosophies shows what happens when we usurp God and place ourselves at the centre.

God loved his world, people, creatures, all creation so much that he sent his only Son into the world. Even though God is the creator and owner of all, and could simply pull rank over all of us, he chose a completely opposite path. Jesus comes not as master and owner, but as servant of all. Jesus rightly stewards the gift of life.

The writer of the book of Hebrews explains it this way, **“Jesus was faithful to the one who appointed him, just as Moses was faithful in all God’s house. Jesus has been found worthy of greater honour than Moses, just as the builder of a house has greater honour than the house itself. Christ is faithful as the Son over God’s house. And we are his house, if indeed we hold firmly to our confidence and the hope in which we glory.”**



Jesus is the faithful steward. He understands his place as God agent of love and mercy. He doesn’t want his own way, but his Father’s. He doesn’t treat people as resources to be used for his benefit, but as objects of God’s love. He doesn’t want to save his own life, but he lays down his life for his friends. He does all of this not to shame us by showing up how badly we have served as stewards, but to recreate us in his image, and to empower us through his Holy Spirit. He gives us eyes to see the world anew as on the day of creation, as the place where we represent God and carry out his will.

This is how Jesus addresses us today: **“Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom.”** God is our provider. We exist because of him and in relationship with him. He cares for us, so we can be confident that he will be our provide for us. Selling our possessions and giving to the poor are an acknowledgement that what we own is also gift, provided by



God, but also to be used in generosity toward others and their needs. Our worldly possessions lose the kind of **‘necessity’** they once had. They are seen in the light of the **“unfailing treasure in heaven,”** our relationship with God through Jesus Christ.

et a steward is always a servant, even a slave, under the authority of the Master of the House. Jesus goes on to say, **“Be dressed ready for service and keep your lamps burning, like servants waiting for their master to return from a wedding banquet, so that when he comes and knocks, they can immediately open the door for him. It will be good for those servants whose master finds them watching when he comes.”** Now this may sound like a hard and relentless task but remember the character of the master we are serving: **“Truly I tell you, he will dress himself to serve, will make them recline at the table and will come and wait on them.”** As indeed Jesus waits on us and serves us today as he comes to us in his holy meal.

Joseph was given responsibility for Pharaoh’s house, all the land of Egypt. When Jesus turned water into wine, the steward had responsibility for that area and was greatly relieved when Jesus restored the wine supply. And we have also been given the greatest privilege and responsibility.

Peter says to us, **“Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God’s grace in its various forms.”** Grace given is grace received, and grace received is grace shared so that God’s love flows into a needy world. Amen.

Peace in Christ

Pastor Andrew Brook