

Good morning and welcome to stewardship season! Fear not weary traveler, you are in the right place and I promise this won't hurt a bit, at least not that much! This month we will be focusing on the reasons we participate in stewardship as we learn how to work for the kingdom of God. That for me is what stewardship is all about, beyond money and institutional systems. Doing the work of the kingdom of God is what Christ calls us to do each and every day and in the gospel this morning.

Luckily Jesus has been mentioning the kingdom of heaven over the last weeks and he's at it again this week as he tells some high ranking Jewish authorities that tax collectors and prostitutes are going to make it to heaven before they will...

Jesus doesn't exactly tell the Pharisees what the kingdom of heaven is like, but he does some good work of explaining the logic behind kingdom work when he tackles the parable of the two sons. Really each of our readings this morning gets down to the point of my sermon series, what does kingdom work look like and how can we grow and do it together? Doing the work of the Kingdom of heaven here on earth is the heart of our stewardship campaign.

The word stewardship means so much to our daily lives and affects our households, our churches and communities- and Stewardship from an explicitly kingdom approach can be a powerful thing as we assess what it means to steward our church

in the 21st century. This kingdom work is transformational and can manifest in a myriad of ways, but I want to focus on four basic stewardship approaches this month.

1. Biblical Stewardship. It is important to be literate in our bibles, to read the word and let it transform our lives. I was raised a pentecostalist and sometimes my bible shows, I've learned this is not just a helpful tool in ministry, but in my personal life. In times of crisis or celebration the word becomes flesh and it's important to honor that.

2. Spiritual stewardship. Spiritual stewardship is the work of the Holy Spirit. Inviting the Holy Spirit to direct, rule and guide us is key to doing the kingdom work required of us as we steward this

community. This work is truly the most transformational and effects our daily lives the most.

3rd. Environmental stewardship. We have to take care of our institutions and that requires work at volunteer, committee and infrastructural levels. More than buildings and grounds projects- this is understanding how our histories actively dictate our present and future. How plaster get in the way of liturgy and how we can provide succession planning to enable the best practices for our institutions.

4. The big one, financial stewardship. Each of these elements of kingdom stewardship work with one another, in tandem or as a system of checks and balances.

Breaking down, stewardship into these four approaches helps us focus as a community on the ways that we can show up for one another as we prepare to make our financial commitment of pledging. We are to assess how we can enable St. Peter's future for years to come.

Jesus in our gospel this morning is doing the kingdom work we are talking about this morning. Honestly- Jesus is doing the kind of work I aspire to as a priest. Jesus is taking the Pharisee's understanding of the kingdom of heaven and turning it upside

down. Last week Jesus told us the last shall be first and the first, last. The kingdom of heaven, whatever it is interpreted to be, is first and foremost not built the way our sinful and sorrow filled world is.

This idea of the kingdom of heaven is radical and so Jesus speaks to us in parables, periscopes and stories, because that is how humans have been learning since the beginning of time.

Jesus uses stories to help his followers, and subsequently us, to identify what justice looks like through the eyes of our savior. He teaches us what accountability feels like, and how we as

Christians can rise to the stewardship work Christ is doing in his ministry. Jesus gives us examples of what kingdom work looks

like, and its literally upside down. That takes some adjustment on our part.

You see kingdom work is different then the work we're told to do by society. Jesus sets an example that doesn't work with the pharisee's status quo, instead he aligns himself with prostitutes and sinners. Jesus loves everyone. Jesus died for everyone, not just the rich and powerful, instead he came especially for the cast down and cast out.

As I said this work is not easy and we need real life examples of such work. Real and raw people that do the work of God without calling attention to their individual rather they point it back to God. A shining saint and stellar stewardship example is

my patron saint, Dolly Parton. As a woman of deep faith Dolly Parton has inspired me for years. I even wrote my introductory theology paper on her, entitled, "TheoDollogy." It was fun to write and even more fun to explain to people, but I have always thought Dolly Parton was a great example of the kind of steward of the kingdom of God that I want to be.

Unique and unapologetically herself, Ms. Parton has charmed the world over with her larger than life appearance and angelic voice. She has made more money than you can think of but was born in a wood shack in a deep holler of Tennessee. A woman who has lived her life exemplifying the 4 tenants of



kingdom stewardship I mentioned at the top of the sermon- Dolly Parton is a fabulous steward of the kingdom of heaven.

Dolly has lived her life steeped in the Bible and Biblical principles and she is a moral agent of good and change. The granddaughter of a Holiness pastor and product of a fundamentalist family- Dolly Parton chose to live her life of faith differently than her family- especially her mother. Dolly Parton found herself sneaking away to sit and chat with prostitutes and so called sinners on the edge of town in her early life and she was dazzled by the makeup and clothing these women would wear. Dolly lived out the principle of flipping the kingdom upside down when she found beauty in the rawness of these women

who were considered to be the lowest of the low. Like Jesus taught, Dolly sat with those that society cast out and they taught her about a different kind of world, one that inspired her to be the independent woman she was.

Aside from Dolly's life of applied biblical stewardship, Dolly's voice is a direct output of the work of her soul and her spiritual stewardship. Her spirituality is present in the love and community she fosters. An adoptive mother to conservatives and drag queens alike, Dolly Parton's applied faith is something so warm and genuine that Dolly can inspire unity amongst the deepest of divides.

Dolly is a steward of the environment, she not only speaks out on ecological justice, but she even provided funding for the Covid Moderna shot. Dolly Parton doesn't work just for herself, she works for the people around her. Dolly took her home county, that was wrecked by the coal industry and provided jobs to the poorest county in the USA.

Most importantly for us and our purposes of stewardship- Dolly Parton participates in radical financial stewardship of the kingdom. From providing reading programs for underfunded schools in the form of Imagination library, to countless charities she is allied with- Dolly Parton makes a difference in the communities around her. Dolly Parton is an incredibly

accomplished woman, who started very humbly but worked very hard and found herself with some lucky breaks along the way- because of this she has always credited God for her success.

She has been the executive producer on her over 40+ studio albums and retains all rights to her music. She taught other women how to sit in board rooms and represent themselves in financial conversations. She enabled others to earn what they were owed and she gave back to the community in return. Dolly could easily be a billionaire but she famously stated there doesn't seem to really be a Christian or ethical way to do that. I think we can learn a lot from that humble Appalachian girl, and that isn't just coming from this humble Appalachian girl.

Above all Dolly is a lighthearted example that anyone can do kingdom work and often its happening in places where you would least expect it. I use Dolly as a way to put flesh and bones on our stewardship campaign this month because the work can be difficult to talk about, but ultimately it is all for the betterment of the kingdom. The way we show up for one another matters. Our pledges help keep the lights on and that matters. We are all different but if we can commit to one another and this institution- together we can do amazing things. Amen.