

November 24, 2019
Stewardship Week Four
Hope Lutheran Church
Rev. Mary Erickson
John 10:10b-18; Philippians 2:1-11

Live Generously

Friends, may grace and peace be yours in abundance in the knowledge of God and Christ Jesus our Lord.

“Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus.” (Philippians 2:5)

Rodney Atkins sings a country song, “Watching You.” The song is about a father with a 4-year old son. It turns out that this son is watching his dad. Dad is his role model. The little boy says to his dad, “I’ve been watching you, dad. Ain’t that cool? I’m your buckaroo, I wanna be like you.”

Dad takes this news to heart. He realizes that he better clean up his act. He doesn’t want his son learning all his bad habits! Dad steals away behind their barn and gets down on his knees to pray.

Later that night, dad goes to tuck in his son at bedtime. His little boy crawls out of bed and gets down on his knees. “He closed his little eyes, folded his little hands and spoke to God like he was talking to a friend, and I said, ‘Son, now where’d you learn to pray like that?’”

And his son says, “I’ve been watching you, dad, Ain’t that cool? I’m your buckaroo, I wanna be like you.”

Role models. We all have them. Our first role models are our parents. We learn basic life skills from them. They also teach us how to interact with other people and be sociable.

We model their manners and empathy and how to be kind hearted.

And then other role models come along. Neighbors, teachers, global figures like Martin Luther King, Jr. Coaches and famous athletes model determination and discipline. When we start a new job, we watch how a seasoned employee gets things done. You can never have too many role models!

But when it comes to examples, we have no greater role model for living than Jesus Christ. St. Paul encourages the Philippians to look to Christ. “Let the same mind be in you,” he says.

Several years ago, a saying became popular: What would Jesus do? That question is intended to help direct our actions. When we get into a situation and we’re not certain how to respond, this very basic question can quickly shed light on our decision. Christ is the pioneer and perfecter of our faith. What would Jesus do? Sometimes just asking the question brings new focus to a situation. “Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus.”

The theme for our fall stewardship emphasis has been “Live Courageously.” We have no greater example and role model for courageous living than our Lord Jesus. The Son of God had dwelt in heaven. He shared equality with God; he was God!

But he set all of that aside in order to dwell with us. What a demonstration of love! He

completely emptied himself. And he did this because he saw no greater aim, no greater fulfillment, no greater purpose, than to live with us. He was born as we are born. He grew up in a household with a mother and father, with grandmothers and grandfathers. He felt pain as we do. He got sick just like we do.

But he did all this for one purpose. His entire life was pointed towards his death. His goal, his end, was the cross!

In our reading from John, Jesus explains his actions as those of a shepherd. A good shepherd does everything in his power to protect his sheep, even to the point of laying down his life. But the wolves Jesus faced weren't four-footed. They were sin and death. Taking them on would require everything he had, even his own life.

Jesus explains his intent. He says, "I came that they may have life, and have it in abundance." Jesus' courageous living allowed him to pour himself out on our behalf. His sole purpose in living was that we may have life, life in all its abundance.

This life now we enjoy – all of it – is a gift from God. EVERYTHING we have is from the hand of God. The spark of our life, every one of the days allotted for us, this beautiful planet, it's all from God. And our relationship with God has been perfectly restored through the saving actions of Christ Jesus our Lord.

So what now? What do we do with this abundant life we've been given? How do we live? This is the heart of Christian stewardship. Having received the abundant mercies of God, we now live to reflect God's generosity.

How do we employ our skills? How do we take care of the people in our lives? How do we utilize our time? How do we take care of

this beautiful planet we call our home? What we do is enhanced when we live generously.

Generosity is a spirit of pouring over. It originates in our core. The Psalmist wrote, "My cup runneth over." That's the heart of generosity. It's related to joy. This feeling emerges when we know with certainty that we have been filled – absolutely. When that happens, this fullness simply pours out from us! The abundance in our heart just spills over.

This internal awareness of abundance then merges with how we live our days. That is stewardship, that is living generously. When our cup runs over, then we live generously.

We are generous in:

- Our hospitality
- In sharing ideas with others
- We become generous with our encouragement
- Generous in our love
- We're generous with our time
- Generous in our volunteering
- Generous in giving the second and third effort
- Generous in patience
- Generous in acceptance of others
- Generous with our means

Generous! Generous because to our core we know that God's mercies are forever. Generous because we know that Christ came that we may have life – abundant, pressed down, shaken together, and running over. Generous because we have the same mind that was in Christ Jesus.