

“The Steward’s Purpose”—Philippians 2:12-13

The text for this sermon, the theme of which is, “The Steward’s Purpose”, is Philippians 2:12-13 → *Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God Who works in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure.* This is the text.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ Jesus:

Are you the type of person who makes it happen or one who looks for someone else to make it happen for you? This is a very valid question especially in the culture in which we live where we are conditioned to look for someone to make it happen for us. It is the nature of audio-visual media to develop us into people who look for others to draw us in, keep our attention, be relevant and entertain us. In other words, we want them to make it happen for us so that the energy we expend will seem minimal, the work will seem like enjoyable play and efforts will be “seamless” (i.e. everything will go smoothly and perfectly).

Since such an attitude feeds the “unholy trinity” (i.e. me, myself & I) we find many people waiting for others to make things happen for them, whether it be in relationships, jobs, organizations and even the church.

It presents challenges in virtually every vocation of life. Such challenges have given birth to the cliché: “10% of the people are doing 90% of the work!” While some use the cliché to complain about everyone else making all the decisions and others use it to complain about everyone else not being as committed (usually as they are), the both stem from the same sin source— self-righteous contempt for others. This should not be the steward’s purpose.

Your lives as stewards of the Gospel of Jesus Christ in this place are defined by something greater than either making it happen or waiting for someone else to make it happen for you. It is defined by your salvation which God has accomplished for you in the Person & Work of Jesus Christ! It is summed up in the words of Galatians 2:20 → *I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ Who lives in me. And **the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, Who loved me and gave Himself for me.*** Our sinful self-righteous contempt has *been crucified with Christ* giving us a new way to live—**by faith in the Son of God**. The steward’s purpose in life is determined by following Jesus as His salvation is at work in and through us.

In verse 12 of our text you are instructed *to work out your salvation with fear and trembling*. Upon hearing such a verse a Lutheran Christian immediately cringes because it hints at being saved—that is, obtaining forgiveness of sins and eternal life—by our own work. What? We’re

suppose *to work out our salvation*? Such a connection of works and salvation seems to go directly against the Christian faith! Paul constantly defended the chief doctrine of Scripture: Justification by grace through faith in Jesus Christ alone. What's he mean by working out our own salvation? He's talking about the steward's purpose.

We are stewards of the Gospel of Jesus Christ—the forgiveness of sins through faith in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. As stewards of this Gospel we have been entrusted with the responsibility to proclaim it, dispense it and bring it to a world lost in sin. In the verses immediately following our text, Paul commands us: *Do all things without grumbling or disputing, that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, holding fast to the word of life.* (Philippians 2:14-16)

Convicting words, no? Ever hear any *grumbling or disputing* amongst us? Unfortunately, it happens far too often. In *grumbling* the devil strives to enslave you to discontentment and contempt for your situation and others. In *disputing* he strives to turn you from stewards who *live by faith in the Son of God* to enemies who have contempt for one another. They mess up your purpose in life as stewards of the Gospel of Jesus Christ as you strive to hold out *the word of life* to others, reflected in your actions. As Jesus commanded in Matthew 5:16 → *Let your light shine*

*before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father Who is in heaven.*

The steward's purpose is to put his salvation to work (i.e. *work out your own salvation*) by serving his Lord and Savior Jesus Christ as the Holy Spirit works through him. Verse 13 of our text says: *It is God Who works in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure.* You see, it's not even a matter of your making it happen but you simply responding in faith as the Holy Spirit moves you to give of yourself in service to His purpose. It is the natural flow of faith in Jesus Christ.

For instance, the Holy Spirit **gives you the desire** to give in all ways in service to God's purpose—holding out the Gospel of Jesus Christ *in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation*. You may not want to serve . . . or you may not feel you should do it . . . or you may not feel adequate or “accredited” for such a task . . . you may not feel that you have the resources to give. But . . . you will still move forward into the task or service or giving because the Holy Spirit **gives you the desire** and God works *His good pleasure* or purpose through you! It may feel uncomfortable, inconvenient and draining, both emotionally and physically. So what? It flows from you in accord with God's purpose as He provides the strength. How many times have you quoted the verse from Philippians 4:13 → *I can do all things **through Him** Who ***strengthens me?****

Notice that the steward's purpose is governed by *fear and trembling*. *Fear and trembling* keeps reminding us of our frail inabilities in the presence of Yahweh's power and holiness. This is important to keep the sin of contempt in check since it is our sinful nature which is constantly checking out how well the other Christian is or isn't performing. Peter had the same struggle after Jesus reinstated him into service. After telling Peter about his death Jesus said to him, *Follow Me*. (cf. John 21:15-19) Jesus was actually instructing Peter to *work out his own salvation* as his salvation would work in service to Him. Immediately Peter looked at John and said, *Lord, what about this man?* (cf. John 21:21) What about him? It is the nature of our sinful arrogance to be put in service to Jesus and then concern ourselves with how everyone else performs.

When the steward's purpose is governed by *fear and trembling* no one in the congregation can boast about his/her accomplishments, least of all their salvation. Paul commanded that *fear and trembling* accompany the lives of believers to keep our rebellious, sinful human nature subdued in the service of God and neighbor so that our purpose as stewards of His grace might be maintained. In Romans 12:3, Paul put it this way: *By the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned*. Once again, it is all God's doing from start to finish, whether

it be your eternal salvation through faith in the Person & Work of Jesus for you or the expression of that salvation through you as God's stewards.

So, instead of monitoring the performance of our fellowship Christians in self-righteous contempt we encourage them with *the word of life* as we continue to serve and give according to our purpose in Christ. Oh . . . and Peter . . . do you know how Jesus responded to him when he was concerned about John's performance and service. Jesus said in John 21:22 → *If it is My will that he remain until I come, what is that to you? **You follow Me!*** Jesus was speaking to Peter about Peter's service, not John's. When living your life as a steward of God's grace Jesus is speaking to you about your service, not everyone else's. Not only that but He's back it with the promise of our text: *For it is **God Who works in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure.** Amen.*

The peace of God, which passes all understanding,  
keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

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