



[Rev. Steven S. Billings](#)

Sermon for Pentecost 4

July 6, 2025

God's Gifts and How We Use Them

Luke 10:1–20

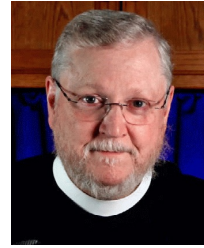
¹ After this the Lord appointed seventy-two others and sent them on ahead of him, two by two, into every town and place where he himself was about to go. ² And he said to them, “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest. ³ Go your way; behold, I am sending you out as lambs in the midst of wolves. ⁴ Carry no moneybag, no knapsack, no sandals, and greet no one on the road. ⁵ Whatever house you enter, first say, ‘Peace be to this house!’ ⁶ And if a son of peace is there, your peace will rest upon him. But if not, it will return to you. ⁷ And remain in the same house, eating and drinking what they provide, for the laborer deserves his wages. Do not go from house to house. ⁸ Whenever you enter a town and they receive you, eat what is set before you. ⁹ Heal the sick in it and say to them, ‘The kingdom of God has come near to you.’ ¹⁰ But whenever you enter a town and they do not receive you, go into its streets and say, ¹¹ ‘Even the dust of your town that clings to our feet we wipe off against you. Nevertheless know this, that the kingdom of God has come near.’ ¹² I tell you, it will be more bearable on that day for Sodom than for that town.

¹³ “Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the mighty works done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago, sitting in sackcloth and ashes. ¹⁴ But it will be more bearable in the judgment for Tyre and Sidon than for you. ¹⁵ And you, Capernaum, will you be exalted to heaven? You shall be brought down to Hades.

¹⁶ “The one who hears you hears me, and the one who rejects you rejects me, and the one who rejects me rejects him who sent me.”

¹⁷ The seventy-two returned with joy, saying, “Lord, even the demons are subject to us in your name!” ¹⁸ And he said to them, “I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. ¹⁹ Behold, I have given you authority to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall hurt you. ²⁰ Nevertheless, do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven.”

Stewardship Under the Cross is the title of this year’s stewardship initiative. But what does it mean? It means that Christian stewardship – our work for God – only makes sense in light of God’s work for us, particularly the work of Jesus on the cross, but also His ongoing work through the gifts that flow from the cross. In fact, it’s fair to say that there is nothing we *can* do for God *apart* from His work on our behalf, past, present, and future.



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It's vital for our Stewardship under the cross to bear in mind that everything we have comes to us from the Giver of all good gifts, including our very selves, our relationships, our possessions, even our calling in life (vocation). These are all gifts that come from the God who loves us and desires to bless us with all good things. When we understand – mentally, emotionally, and spiritually – that He is the Source of everything we are and have, we will begin to comprehend how best to use His gifts – for our own good and for the good of others. Our use of these gifts demonstrates our appreciation, not only for the gifts, but for the One who gives them to us.

Of course, the most monumental and impactful gifts – the ones that change our destiny for time and eternity – are the ones delivered at the cross, though it's difficult for us to recognize and acknowledge them, because they're often imperceptible to the eyes of our flesh.

But some things are too important to leave to the eyes alone. No one could "see" that Jesus was God, yet some understood that, when He was with His disciples, God was in their midst. Jesus commended them, saying, "Blessed are the eyes that see what you see! For I tell you that many prophets and kings desired to see what you see, and did not see it" (Luke 10:23).

So it is with the Church. If we're ever to grasp the bountiful riches of the gifts of God, ordinary eyesight and intellect will have to be set aside. Such gifts cannot be seen solely with sinful human eyes, for they're wrapped in lowly packages that are easy to overlook – water, word, and meal. Yet behind these three stands Jesus Himself and the power of His Word. There's life in that Word – and the Sacraments are its wrappings. In the Sacraments the invisible power of God and His eternal Word lies wrapped in visible outer elements. These are where Jesus personally meets people today. And nowhere does He do this more intimately than in His Holy Supper, where once again Jesus eats with sinners for the forgiveness of their sins, just as He did so many years ago.

During His public ministry Jesus often ate, drank, and conversed with sinners. It didn't earn Him much respect with the Pharisees, but their grumbling didn't stop Him. "It isn't the healthy who need a doctor," He said, "but the sick. I have come to call sinners to repentance" (Luke 5:32). And that's precisely what happened in every case. Wherever Jesus was, there salvation was present. It walked in the door when Jesus walked in – sat at the table when Jesus sat down – and, whenever He spoke, it was salvation speaking. Where Jesus is, there is the forgiveness of sins, and where there's forgiveness of sins, there's also life and salvation – God's free gifts given in His Son. The Good News, beloved, is that, in Word and Sacrament, the real presence of Jesus is still with us.

Did you ever wonder why public worship is referred to as a Divine Service? It's because God is here serving you through Word and Sacrament. Divine Service is not about you serving God, it's about Him serving you by speaking to you through His Holy Word and feeding you with His very body and blood.



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Though He has risen and ascended to the Father's right hand in glory, He's still present in His Church. Though unseen to the naked eye, in His Holy Word and Sacraments, He still sits at table with sinners to teach them of His love. What He did in times past, He does even now. What happened then, happens today – people short on godliness but long on sin, find forgiveness – and there's healing in that forgiveness, for wherever Jesus is, there is life and salvation. This then, is the very essence of the Sacred Meal we call Holy Communion. It's the real presence of Jesus Christ with His Church, for in this meal, He eats with sinners – who, confessing their sins, find in Him forgiveness, life, and salvation.

"Do this, whenever you drink it," He said on the night of His betrayal. "Do this in remembrance of Me." Yet, when we hear these words, we wonder what they mean. Is this Meal simply a bunch of people kneeling and thinking about the deliverance God won for them at Calvary? Is it "remembering" Jesus like we might reminisce about a departed loved one?

Jesus helps our understanding by saying, "Take and eat, this is My body; drink of it, all of you, this is My blood of the covenant, poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins" (Mat. 26:26-28). So this is no mere memory exercise. It's the real thing. This eating and drinking is the meal of our deliverance.

Jesus gave His body and blood for us on the cross, and in His Holy Meal He distributes that very same body and blood again and again for us Christians to eat and to drink. "Do this, in remembrance of Me," He says. And, as we participate in this Supper, what are we remembering? We're remembering His work of redemption for us on the cross. In this Supper, the fruit of His labor is applied to us individually and personally according to our faith.

Jesus hasn't left anything to chance. He knows what we're like. He knows our tendency to doubt. He knows we're just like those to whom the apostles were sent, always looking for a sign. He knows we're just like the disciples who rejoiced more at the signs than the salvation they proclaimed. We need something we can touch, see, feel, and understand. So He presents us here with the tangible, physical results of His death on our behalf. Under the bread and wine of His Holy Supper, Jesus hands us the substance of our deliverance from sin and death. "Take and eat," He says, "My body given for you. Take and drink the new covenant in My blood, which is poured out for you for the forgiveness of your sins." In these words, and in these elements, our faith is encouraged and we are given a reason for rejoicing. This is the meal of our deliverance.

But our Lord isn't the only One preaching a sermon every time this Meal is received. Every person who kneels at this altar and receives this Meal is likewise giving a powerful public testimony in their eating and drinking. And the testimony given by our participation in this Meal isn't just before the other people who are kneeling at the Communion Rail with us. Our testimony is also before angels, and archangels, and all the company of heaven.



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As St. Paul teaches, "Whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes" (1 Cor. 11:26).

Why do you suppose we call this a feast? We're not gorging ourselves on the little scrap of bread we eat and the tiny sip of wine we receive. It's not the quantity of the food that makes this a feast, it's the quality of the food and the setting in which the food is delivered to us.

To the ancients, a feast was a time to celebrate their unity with one another. When Jesus ate publicly with notorious sinners, He was showing His solidarity with them even as He called them to repentance and salvation through that meal, and His presence changed their lives. Zacchaeus is a good example. His salvation came, not as a result of his promise to amend his sinful ways, but on account of his faith in Jesus. So it is with us. Wherever Jesus eats and drinks with sinners, salvation has arrived in that place, and hearts are turned to Him in repentance and faith.

Here, in the shadow of the cross, our Savior prepares a table before us. And we receive the gifts He gives, joining together with angels, and archangels, and all the company of heaven, singing the ancient song that goes on forever: "Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honor, and glory, and praise!" For though we are dying in this world, we have been given life in this feast – a life that never ends, a life that we then offer back to God in loving service to Him, using His gifts to His glory. That is stewardship under the cross: receiving that we may give. In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen