

StewardCAST

A monthly e-newsletter of LCMS Stewardship Ministry

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Exodus 35 Stewardship

“I have good stewardship news and bad stewardship news ...”

Anyone who has ever been to a commitment Sunday or weekend in a local Lutheran congregation has heard the same tired, but still very true, joke that pastors and stewardship leaders have used. It goes something like this: “I have good stewardship news and bad stewardship news. The good stewardship news is that we have all the resources we need to do the ministry in a faithful way in this congregation. But the bad news is that you are all still sitting on it!” While this joke is often met with a groan or perhaps even a courtesy laugh, it surely is not taken seriously by many. If this were not such a serious matter, it might well be funny. But stewardship isn’t really funny. It is a serious matter.

What makes this joke even less funny is that it is actually true, based on Scripture. When one reads Exodus 35, this “more than enough resources” reality is spelled out among the people of Israel. The mighty hand and outstretched arm of Yahweh had miraculously delivered God’s people from slavery in Egypt. They had walked through the Red Sea on dry ground. They had seen the majesty of Sinai, if only from a distance and from below. What they had seen firsthand was the mercy of God in action. It is in this light that Yahweh gives the instruction to build a very unique and special structure called the tabernacle.

This was not your ordinary building project like might be undertaken today. There was no “Wilderness Hardware and Building Supply” company from which to purchase their supplies. What happened was nothing short of miraculous. In Exodus 35 and 36 we read of our Lord’s call for stewards to support the work of construction of a place to worship Him. The unique thing was that it had to be portable. Israel was constructing a place to worship the Lord before they even reached their final destination. What’s more, the Lord gave them very detailed instructions for the construction for His mobile house of worship. So, with specific instructions and no hardware stores around, from where would the material come?

Appeal to a Generous Heart

There was only one source: God's people. Here is how the Lord commanded Moses to speak to the people of Israel:

Moses said to all the congregation of the people of Israel, "This is the thing that the Lord has commanded. Take from among you a contribution to the Lord. Whoever is of a generous heart, let him bring the Lord's contribution" (EX. 35:4-5A).

The Lord called for a contribution to build the tabernacle. But notice something amazing. There is not a tone of compulsion in this call. There were no percentages prescribed. The Lord simply appealed to those of a generous heart. Why would God's people be generous? Remember what had just happened. The people being commanded to participate in the contribution had just seen the mighty hand and outstretched arm of Yahweh in action. They had eaten the Passover. The blood of the lamb smeared on the doorpost of their homes had spared them from death. The very people who had oppressed them sent them on their way

with more than enough supplies and wealth. From slavery to freedom was a journey that they were led on by the mercy of God. God's generosity had provided for them. This was a simple call to respond in generous thanksgiving to the Lord who had given them a new life of freedom.

God's mercy did more than serve as a call for an ingathering of supplies. This was not a call to a transaction. God was not collecting on a debt. He was asking for so much more. It was also a call to action. Here is how Moses relates this call to action.

Let every skillful craftsman among you come and make all that the Lord has commanded (EX. 35:10).

The call to generous response was a call from Yahweh for the people of Israel to be fully invested. They were not just contracting some hired hands to do the labor. The Lord had provided His people with the resources and the skill to do exactly what He had commanded them to do. They would build this tabernacle to spec not out of compulsion but out of generosity and service.

More Than Enough

Here in the wilderness was a call for generosity. Here in the wilderness was a call for service. What was most impressive was the response. Moses tells us how the tabernacle's "capital campaign" worked.

And Moses called Bezalel and Oholiab and every craftsman in whose mind the Lord had put skill, everyone whose heart stirred him up to come to do the work. And they received from Moses all the contribution that the people of Israel had brought for doing the work on the sanctuary. They still kept bringing him freewill offerings every morning, so that all the craftsmen who were doing every sort of task on the sanctuary came, each from the task that he was doing, and said to Moses, "The people bring much more than enough for doing the work that the Lord has commanded us to do." So Moses gave command, and word was proclaimed throughout the camp, "Let no man or woman do anything more for the contribution for the sanctuary." So the people were restrained from bringing, for the material they had was sufficient to do all the work, and more (EX. 36:2-7).

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GIVE NOW



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There were more than enough laborers. There were more than enough materials. The thankful generosity of God’s people was so great that they actually had tell the people to STOP giving. Why? Was it because Moses put on a slick campaign? Did he preach any emotionally manipulative sermons talking about sacrifice and blessing? Was there ever a guilt-drive to give more? Not hardly! The people of Israel didn’t need it. They had the mercy of God right there before them! Nothing inspires human generosity more than having the generosity of God in full view.

Wouldn’t it be great if the vision of the Lord’s generosity would be so clear for God’s people today? What could happen in the local congregation, the Districts and even the Synod if the clear sight of God’s generosity was held up on a weekly, even daily basis?



Of course, when the tongue is removed from the cheek, it is clear that this generosity of the Lord is still daily and weekly visible for God’s people. In clear and accurate proclamation of God’s Word and the weekly reception of the Lord’s Supper, the Lord’s generosity is experienced in full sensory perception. The Gospel is heard, seen, tasted, touched and smelled. This is a full experience of God’s generosity.

From this generosity is a call for God’s people to be fully invested for the sake of the ministry. It is the Lord who first gives us His generous care and then we are called to live generously in response. Peter captures this well when he writes about another building that the Lord constructs.

The Generosity of God

As you come to him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and

precious, you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ (1 PETER 2:4-5).

The generosity of God’s living stone, Jesus, builds us into a new and different “tabernacle” called the Church. This church is never for want of resources, if it remembers from whence the greatest generosity comes.

It is true that the Lord has indeed blessed every congregation with more than enough resources to carry out the ministry of Word and Sacrament. They have the Gospel! The congregation may or may not be able to pay a pastor’s salary or benefits, it may not be able to afford its own building or many other amenities which are so often expected in

the local congregation, but the resources are there for the ministry of the Gospel. God’s generosity is not lacking! The gifts are there. Where the Word of God is taught in its truth and purity and the Sacraments are administered according to their institution by Christ, there are ample resources to do this ministry.

What is lacking in this situation is a view of God’s mercy. This will not come from manipulation or a glossy print piece that talks about potential ministry. God’s people will be generous when the Lord’s Word is lavished on them. Like Israel of old, God’s mercy is ever before His people. At the font, on the altar and from the pulpit, God’s generosity washes over His people. His generosity inspires the generosity of His people. Every time it is given, it works! It is time for more Exodus 35 stewardship!