

**PARK HILL UNITED METHODIST CHURCH
WORLD COMMUNION SUNDAY
REV. JOHN L. THOMPSON
“STEWARDSHIP INVOLVES GIVING SOMETHING
BACK TO GOD’S KINGDOM”
Matthew 21:33-46
October 5, 2008
8:45 & 11:00 A.M. SERVICES**

This parable teaches that God holds us accountable for what becomes of the blessings we are given. God expects a return on the investment that has been made in our lives. Our stewardship involves giving something back to God’s kingdom.

Jesus had finally arrived in Jerusalem and had cleansed the temple. This did not endear him to the religious establishment, as you might imagine. Feelings were running hot. So Jesus told a parable about a landowner who planted a vineyard.

It was huge and completely fenced in. It even had a watch tower to guard against outside attacks or wild animals. After a while the landowner could no longer maintain this vast estate so he leased it to the tenants and left it in their care. All he asked in return was a share of the produce at harvest time. The tenants gladly agreed.

When harvest time came the landowner sent some servants to the vineyard to collect his share of the produce. High in the watch tower the tenants saw the servants approaching. Instead of welcoming them, though, and handing over their rightful payment the tenants beat one of the servants, killed another and stoned yet another. Word reached the landowner. He was extremely displeased. He sent some more servants for his share and again the same thing happened.

Finally, the landowner decided to send his son. *“They will respect my*

son,” he thought. When the tenants saw the son approaching, they said among themselves, **“This is the heir; come, let us kill him and get his inheritance.”** And that’s exactly what they did. The tenants killed the landowner’s son. Responsibility for others requires our clearest thinking and our greatest efforts. At the heart of the moral person is a sense of responsibility.

There are times when all of us act as if the world is our kingdom and we are supreme over all we survey. We forget that everything we have is on loan to us from God. We are temporary tenants. We don’t own anything, even though we sometimes act as if we own it all. Everything ultimately belongs to God.

There was a church located next door to a supermarket. Since the church was short on parking spaces and the supermarket was closed on Sundays, the church leaders asked the owner of the supermarket for permission to park in his lot. The owner’s response was **“Fine. You are welcome to use it 51 weeks a year.”** **“What about the other week?”** the church members asked. **“That week,”** said the owner of the market, **“I’ll chain off the lot so you will always remember that the lot belongs to me, and not to the church.”** ⁽¹⁾

Good point. We act like owners when we are only tenants. This brings us to the second thing we need to say. Happiness comes to those who understand they own nothing. These tenants in our lesson were greedy. They wanted everything for themselves and were unwilling to give the landowner his fair share. The landowner, on the other hand, was generous. He had given them control of his vast estate. They could have all of its abundance. All he asked was a share of the produce. Sounds like you and me, doesn’t it? Sounds like every person who has ever walked this earth. God has provided for us so abundantly. All He asks is a small portion in return. But we are greedy. We want to withhold what is rightfully His. How sad. The happiest people who have ever lived are those who gratefully acknowledge the ownership of God.

William White once told of visiting his 98-year-old mother-in-law in a nursing home. He remembers her quietly saying, **“Think of the lilies and how they grow.”** Long ago this frail, blind woman made the discovery that all of life is a blessing from God. She spent much of her time repeating scripture verses that she learned throughout her life. The scriptures gave her

both strength and comfort during many lonely hours. She was an active woman right up until she entered the nursing home, walking a mile a day, though her eyesight was gradually worsening. She loved people and was always helping them. Even in the nursing home she used a walker to spread her joyful faith.

“Facing each day is not easy for her,” White reflected, **“but she keeps her spirits up.”** How? She felt that even at ninety-eight she had a mission. There in the nursing home she was able to touch the lives of other residents as well as some employees. In fact some former employees who changed jobs still returned to the nursing home to spend time with this remarkable woman. William White was inspired when his mother-in-law told him how thankful she was to have memorized so many scriptures before she lost her eyesight. Those scriptures filled her heart with the Lord. (2)

This dear 98-year-old lady did not have much left in this world but she had the only thing we ever really own her faith in God. Everything else that we have is on loan. Someday it will be passed on to someone else. Don't you see? No matter how rich we are, if we are not rich toward God, we don't have anything! The vineyard belongs to Him. Happiness is found in recognizing our place as His tenants His stewards. But there is one thing more to be said.

We have another important responsibility. Jesus calls us to good stewardship. He asked the religious officials what the owner of the vineyard would do to the rebellious tenants. They had no difficulty responding, ***“He will put those wretches to miserable death, and lease the vineyard to other tenants who will give him the produce at the harvest time.”*** Little did they know they were condemning themselves with their answer. You see, the parable was about them. They had been entrusted with the spiritual care of God's people. Unfortunately, many of them looked upon it only as a job a way of earning a good living a source of prestige and power. They were so set in their ways that they stoned the prophets who threatened their comfortable life and eventually they crucified God's own Son. That's a warning to every one of us involved in religious work whether as clergy or as laity. We have a responsibility.

We just celebrated our 97th church anniversary. Our current budget is over \$700,000.00. Next year's budget maybe even more than \$800,000.00. But much of our spending has been on ourselves; the cost of maintaining our

aging facility. We spend thousands and thousands of dollars on our building when our business is caring for people. You see, many of the dollars we generate are used up keeping our facility going. But this is not how we started. This is not the history of Park Hill. But this is where we are now. All our energy used up just keeping the church afloat? Could it be that we have not truly heard Jesus' message? Could it be that we, too, confuse our mission with comfort and ease? Would Christ receive the same reception here that he received in biblical times?

This is not our world, it's God's. This is not our church, it's God's. We are only tenants. Stewards! We have a responsibility to bear fruit by returning to God a portion of what is His already, and to use that which we have received to His glory. What good is a fig tree that does not bear fruit? And what good is a follower of Jesus who does not bear fruit? Our stewardship involves giving something back to God's kingdom.

Today is World Wide Communion. As we partake of his body and blood this day, may this be a time of receiving his love, his joy, his peace, that we might fully bear the kind of fruit that he calls us to bear.

1. Bruce McLarty, College Church of Christ, Searcy, AR.
2. William H. White, "Still a Witness," Upper Room, Jan/Feb 1993, p. 29.