

Sing a Song of Stewardship

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Once in a while I'll get a call from a Florida Conference Church looking for a guest preacher for a special Sunday. As you might imagine, the occasion usually has something to do with stewardship, such as kicking off or culminating a stewardship program, or honoring church members who have planned bequests to their church. That sort of thing. For someone who doesn't do a lot of preaching, it's a big task, but one I enjoy.

When I start thinking about such an assignment, I always look first at what's called the Revised Common Lectionary, which is a fancy term for the three-year cycle of scripture readings appointed for each Sunday. During those three years most of the Bible is covered. Sometimes one of the appointed texts has a stewardship message built right in, like the time last summer when the Gospel quoted Jesus, "You received without payment, give without payment." Others are not so obvious, but so far I have found a stewardship "nugget" in every Sunday's texts.

The same thing can be said about hymns. Our *United Methodist Hymnal* and the new *Faith We Sing* supplement are full of wonderful music and poetry, much of which has a stewardship component.

Sometimes you find a stewardship message in an unexpected place, such as Christina Rossetti's beautiful Christmas carol "In the Bleak Midwinter." The fourth stanza is:

*What can I give him, poor as I am?
If I were a shepherd, I would bring a lamb;
If I were wise man, I would do my part;
Yet what I can I give him: give my heart.*

Others turn up in rather expected places, like

*We give thee but thine own, whate'er the gift may be.
All that we have is thine alone, a trust O Lord from thee.*

Isaac Watts was a contemporary of John and Charles Wesley, and one of my favorite verses of his is the last stanza of "When I Survey the Wondrous Cross:"

*Were the whole realm of nature mine,
That were an offering far too small.
Love so amazing, so divine,
Demands my soul, my life, my all.*

And you don't have to go back to the 18th century either. Here's a verse from Jane Marshall's 1980 hymn "What Gift Can We Bring?"

*What gift can we bring, what present, what token?
What words can convey it, the joy of this day?
When grateful we come, remembering, rejoicing,
What song can we offer in honor and praise?*

And as usual, simple is best:

*Freely, freely you have received.
Freely, freely give.
Go in my name and because you believe,
Others will know that I live.*

As the stewardship voice of the Florida Conference, the Foundation is ready to help you, your family and your church with anything related to comprehensive Christian stewardship. For more

information please call, click or write us at 1-866-363-9673 toll-free; www.fumf.org; or PO Box 3549, Lakeland, FL 33802.