

## Stewards of the Cross

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### Galatians 6:11-18 (NRSV)

*See what large letters I make when I am writing in my own hand! It is those who want to make a good showing in the flesh who try to compel you to be circumcised—only that they may not be persecuted for the cross of Christ. Even the circumcised do not themselves obey the law, but they want you to be circumcised so that they may boast about your flesh. May I never boast of anything except the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me and I to the world. For neither circumcision nor uncircumcision is anything, but a new creation is everything! As for those who will follow this rule—peace be upon them, and mercy, and upon the Israel of God.*

*From now on, let no one make trouble for me, for I carry the marks of Jesus branded on my body.*

*May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit, brothers and sisters. Amen.*

This week while driving through Portland I saw this billboard:



It was the word “stewardship” that first caught my attention. It is a word that gets thrown around a lot in the church, so even though it is not a strictly “churchy” word, it was attention getting to see it out in the wild. A bit like a first grader seeing their teacher at the grocery store and thinking “she eat food just like me!” 😊

Last Sunday we kicked off our Stewardship Campaign and Star stood up here on the chancel and invited us each to consider our part in supporting the stewardship of the

church. So, I had stewardship on my mind when I saw the billboard. And after seeing this billboard it was all I could think about.

According to the Oxford dictionary, stewardship simply means to take care of something.

It is fitting that Jane Goodall is the one who graced this billboard as a steward. She has devoted her life to caring for primates and advocating for conservation and animal welfare. She lives her life in a manner that shows what she believes, what she is passionate about, and what she desires for the future.

It got me thinking, what are other things we are stewards of?

We are stewards of the earth. We pick up trash and are mindful of our consumption. We research what native plants are best and take action to lower our output of harmful chemicals. But also, we look to the future and want to steward the earth in a way that helps it to thrive for coming generations.

We are stewards of children. We care for them by simply keeping them alive; giving them food, water, clothes, and shelter. But we also do so much more. We shape them and form them. We love them and delight in them. We spoil them and challenge them. We steward children with the hope that they are good humans, we care about them in the present, but we also try to set them up for success in the future.

We are stewards of our time. We are each given 24 hours a day. We get no more or no less hours each day. How we care for our time tells us about what matters to us. And we all know that we need some variety in how we steward our time. We can't just forgo sleep indefinitely. We need to sleep. We use our time to nourish our body. We use our time to be in the company of friends or family. We use our time to work. We use our time to be creative. We get to steward our time and use it in a way that is hopefully enriching and sets us up for success long into the future.

Stewardship is about taking care of something, but it carries weight with it. There is an intentionality in stewarding. We care for something—wanting it to be the best it can be—while also setting it up for success in the future. Stewardship is mindful of the past, active in the present, and has eyes toward the future.

Today we are wrapping up our sermon series on the book of Galatians. For the last seven weeks, Matt has walked us through the book of Galatians; chapter by chapter, verse by verse. And now we come to the end, the final 8 verses.

Let's take a bit of a look back. This is a letter written by the apostle Paul to the church communities in Galatia (modern day Turkey). In Paul's journeys he had been to Galatia and built relationships with the church communities there. Paul is writing this letter in the late

40's to early 50's CE. Jesus died and was resurrected only 15 to 20 years earlier. So, we are still very much in transition, as the formation of Christianity is taking root.

What started out as a Jewish messianic movement, has spread far beyond the Jewish people. The Christian community in Galatia actually consisted of just as many non-Jewish people as Jewish people.

The Jewish tradition is steeped in ritual, practices, and deep reverence to the laws of the Torah. Generations and generations of families have devoted their lives to keeping these laws and obeying the commandments. Then comes Jesus who turns everything upside down. We often say in Kidventure that the kingdom of Jesus is an upside-down kingdom. He takes the faithful, intentional, practices of the Jewish community and offers a new way of living out their faith. The letters that we read in the New Testament are the hard work of these early Christian communities figuring out how to practically be Christian; how to transition into the community of Christ followers.

Specifically in Galatia, Paul is addressing the ongoing disputes between those in the community who are trying to marry together their reverence for keeping the laws of the Torah with their belief and devotion to Jesus. And we see in Paul's letter to the Galatians, the frustration that he has with these Jewish believers. They can't have it both ways. In fact, Paul says that it is a betrayal to God. Our relationship with God comes NOT through the obeying of the laws, but through the grace we receive through the faith of Jesus.

This brings us to our scripture today. The letter that has been written thus far is most likely Paul dictating to a scribe. Then we get to the end of the letter and Paul says, "See what large letters I make when I am writing in my own hand!" Some of you might be familiar with the acronym TL;DR. This stands for "too long; didn't read" and is often used as a summary or to make sure that the reader takes away the most important parts of the reading. This is Paul's TL;DR. Paul is adding on an additional part to the letter with his own hand. He is saying, "if you only take away one thing from this this letter, this is the most important part". So, we know we need to listen up.

Paul tells us, the old way of doing things is in the past, the only thing that matters now is the cross. **THE ONLY THING THAT MATTERS IS THE CROSS.** The cross is where Jesus the Christ died. The cross is where you have been brought into relationship with God. The cross is where faith is made new. The cross is the message that you should be proclaiming. The law was our past, but the cross is the now, and the cross sets your agenda for the future; you are stewards of the message of the cross.

Those who are focused on the law—the law meaning: who is circumcised and who is not—they are boasting about the wrong thing. In fact, they are so focused on YOU obeying the law, they aren't even obeying the law themselves! They are all show! Paul says there is only one thing to boast about—there is only one thing that matters now—and that is the cross.

The Bible Project summarizes these last few verses by saying: “what really matters is God’s new creation. The new, multiethnic family of the Messiah, full of faith in Jesus, loving God and others in the power of the Holy Spirit.”

In election season we are continually being told what should be most important to us. We need to pay attention to immigration! No, we need to pay attention to foreign spending! We need to pay attention to reproductive rights! No, we need to pay attention to \_\_\_\_\_ (fill in the blank). I would wager to guess that just like the community in Galatia, there are many people who take advantage of the polarizing political rhetoric to boast about what they think is right for others, while not paying attention to their own actions. So, the message in Paul’s letter to the Galatians is tremendously relevant today.

Don’t be so concerned with keeping your neighbors in line that you lose sight of what’s most important. Keep your eyes on the cross. It is through the cross that we are a new creation. We are God’s creation. We live in the love and grace and mercy that God has heaped upon us through Jesus. And because we are focused on the cross, our life in turn reflects our focus.

This brings me back to the billboard sign I saw. When we talk about stewardship, we are talking about taking care of something. We—like Paul and like the early church in Galatia—are stewards of the message of the cross. We see where we have come from, we carry it with us, and we shape how it is passed into the future. When we focused on the cross, our lives and our faith reflect that focus. How we steward our money. How we steward our time. How we steward our relationships with our friends, our family, our children, our community. How we steward our resources. How we steward our talents and gifts. They will all reflect our focus on the cross.

We are each uniquely gifted, so our stewardship is going to look unique to each of us. For Jane Goodall she focuses her stewardship on animal husbandry and conservation. For me I feel deeply called to steward teens as they traverse adolescence. What is on your billboard? What do you steward? We are each called to steward the time, talent, and treasures that have been trusted to us, in light of a life that reflects the cross. I am grateful that Christianity is a large enough to include all of us trying our best to focus our eyes on the cross. May we love God well as we love each other well.