**Psalm 127:1 October 3, 2021 (Stewardship Sunday)**

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Our text for this morning is the first verse of our Introit from Psalm 127 verse one. “Unless the Lord builds the house, those who built it labor in vain.” This is our text.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

How much labor in our world today is done in vain? Something being done in vain meaning that it produces no result, or it is useless. In our own community we have seen businesses in Manistee that have remodeled buildings, advertised, put up signs, opened and in less than a year, gone out of business and closed. What an enormous amount of labor that was all done in vain. I remember my time in Kansas, living in an agricultural community I got an appreciation for all that it takes to be a farmer. I got to see all of the work that goes into plowing, spraying, planting, and finally the crop is ready for harvest, only for a hailstorm to come and knock it all down. All of that labor, all of that work, all done in vain. And here the Psalmist lays it out clearly, “Unless the Lord builds the house, those who built it labor in vain.” It is with these words that we focus on a Stewardship emphasis this Sunday, which speaks about our labor, our possessions, our money, our talents and abilities, but also we find the key point in any Stewardship focus, that unless the Lord is the driving force behind what we have, and what we do, it will all be in vain.

The Lord must build the house, or in this case, the Lord must lead your life. It’s important for a proper understanding of the steward you have been called to be that you see all you have as coming from God’s providing hand. This is emphasized in the 1st Article of the Apostles Creed and Martin Luther’s explanation. He has given you everything, all that you need to support this body and life, your eyes, ears, reason, senses, clothing, shoes, food, drink, house, home, and the list goes. We find this in our Old Testament lesson from Genesis chapter 2 as well. Man was not created to sit and be slothful, lazy, and do nothing but eat the fruit and roam the garden. Man was created to serve, and so every beast of the field and every bird of the heavens was brought so that Adam would name them. Man and Woman were made for each other, as partners to serve together, to take care of the world that God had made and to be faithful stewards of it. God had built the “house” in this instance, of the entire world, and God had built the “house” of their own bodies, the home of their talents and abilities. The Garden of Eden is a return for us to see where it all began, and a reminder of where it all came from. Not just the world around us, but all that we have. Everything was made by God, belongs to God, and was given by God. The food that we have is from God. The intellect that we have is from God. We’ve been entrusted with it to labor here on Earth and serve Him in whatever vocation and place He has called us to. This is the building of the house of our lives, this is the foundation of our service to God as stewards.

And from the beginning we can see labors that were done in vain. The world fell into horrible atrocities and sinful intentions being the only thing in their hearts before the flood. The tower of babel was an enormous labor of the people that was all done completely and totally in vain. Labor itself in our world today is usually put on a pedestal and seen as a good thing, staying busy is applauded, and it’s not necessarily something that the Word of God would be against. We are called to serve, to work, to use what God has given us. If a Man doesn’t work He shall not eat. This is a biblical principle. We are to use the talents that God has given us, not hide them in a field and hope for the best as we see in the parable of the talents. Work is a good thing. Work is what we are called to do. But labor can also be done in vain, even if it yields results and succeeds here on earth in earthly ways. To be a proper steward is to manage what God has given you in God pleasing ways. After all, to use the imagery of this particular verse, what good is the house that the Lord builds, if we don’t use it?

Any talk of Stewardship inevitably gets a response that all we’re going to talk about is treasures or your money. That a Sunday like Stewardship Sunday is really nothing more than a fundraising effort for the church, to guilt you into putting a few more dollars into the offering plate. But that’s not the case at all. Stewardship isn’t all about money, it’s about using what God has given you in a God-pleasing way. The Lord has given you money, and it is a blessing in our lives to use for the needs that we have, but we also use it in so many useless ways that are completely and totally vain. Vain in both definitions: Vain in the sense of feeding our own ego, and vain in the sense of producing nothing at all. Think of our own community again, and the biggest waste of money you can find in our own backyard? Has there ever been a better example of the use of money being in vain than going to a casino? Gambling is an example of not being a faithful steward of what God has blessed you with but instead using it in vain. But again I remind you, Stewardship isn’t so much about specifically talking about money, it’s about talking about using what God has given you in a God-pleasing way. God has given you so many gifts, gifts of this very church, a place to come and worship where nothing is demanded of you in terms of a membership fee or a set number of hours of service you have to give. How involved you are with your church is between you and God, that’s the truth of Stewardship, that’s the biggest takeaway we’ve had in our Bible Study these past few weeks on Sunday mornings looking at insights from the book of Proverbs. Your faithful Stewardship to God is between you and God, and what it boils down to is that when you look in the mirror and when you really think about what God has blessed you with and what you’ve returned in thanks to God in terms of all He’s given you, you have to ask yourself in the reflection of God’s Word and truly wrestle with the question, “have I been a faithful steward?”

It’s good to take a moment and really think about your own life and if what you’ve been doing is being done in vain. I think about an experience I had one evening as I was sitting down and looking up things on my computer. And I came across the streaming service “twitch”. Twitch is a place where you can watch other people who have broadcasted themselves on the internet watching movies and commenting on them or playing video games where people watch them play. They go for high scores or to beat a game in a certain amount of time and some of the people who get on to play have thousands and thousands of people who tune in and watch just like you would a football game. And I remember thinking, how many people are doing this, taking the time to link everything up and turn on a camera, and make signs or programs or go through all the work to stream themselves doing this, and no one is watching. And I just clicked on a game, and clicked on the last page of results, as the first ones are the most popular players, and I found a large number of people, who put in all this work, and were doing this, and no one was watching. All of that work was done in vain. And I wondered, what would be the breaking point? When would it set in that what they were doing was producing no result?

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ, Stewardship Sunday isn’t a shakedown, it’s not a guilt trip, it’s not a fundraiser, it’s a moment for you to honestly look at your life, and see that the Lord has built the house of your body, the temple of the Holy Spirit, has given you the faith that receives all of the wonderful gifts He has blessed you with, has given His Son to die for you and rise for you to save you from your sins, that God has blessed you with everything you have, and for just a moment, just a small moment, ask yourself, if you’ve been laboring, and using these wonderful gifts, in vain. Have you been a faithful steward of all that God has given you? And if we are truly honest with ourselves in our hearts, we’ll recognize our sin, we’ll recognize our failures, we’ll repent of those sins before God our heavenly Father, and receive the forgiveness we desperately need every moment of our lives. We are not perfect stewards, just as Adam and Eve failed in the garden so would we, and we have failed in our daily lives. But God has redeemed us from our failures, God has forgiven us for our selfishness and mismanagement of what He has blessed us with, and on this particular Sunday of the Church Year we can see the love that God has for us and the mercy He shows to us in that He doesn’t immediately rip all of the blessings He gives us away from us after we have mismanaged them, but rather He continues to bless us in our lives even when we don’t deserve it. We can recognize how much God has given us when we in no way deserve any of it, and that can be the motivation for our works of thanksgiving and the change in our lives which brings out these fruits of good works and us being faithful stewards of His gifts. For us to really stop and look at the gift of time that we have been blessed with and use it faithfully and not in vain. To use our treasures in the service of God and his house, and to use our talents for more than our own fame and our own name, but instead to glorify God in any and all vocations that He has called us to. We are His stewards, and He has built this house that we are sitting in and He has built the house of your body, and He will bring you to His house of glory when He wills it. Until that time, serve the Lord with gladness doing works of thanksgiving not because you have to, but because you get to be his servant and a faithful steward. God be praised for all He’s given us.

Amen.

The peace of God which surpasses all human understanding keep our hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.