The Reverend David Powers
Sunday, October 25, 2026

Friends, that's all the announcements I have for the good of the order this day. But I'll let you know if you're joining us for the first time in a couple weeks. We have been moving through a sermon series we've entitled Greek 101. This is of course on the heels of Hebrew 101. A couple weeks ago, Reverend Lucy Cummings, who's right back there, preached to us about Paracletus, which means advocate or comforter. And then just last week, our Theologian in Residence Steve Haynes preached to us on Klesis, which means calling. I commend both of those proclamations of the word to you. You can go to our YouTube page or to the podcast and you can listen to those. They're valuable and important sermons to hear as we study the language of the New Testament. This morning the word that we will center our attention on is Oikonomos, which means steward or household manager. Okay, steward or household manager. We will learn of this word, this Greek word from First Peter the 4th chapter, verses 8-10. But before we read God's word, let us go to God in prayer. Let's do so by getting comfy in our pews.

Let's take a deep breath in together. And breathe it out slowly.
Another deep breath in. And breathe it out slowly. And breathe in God's mercies. Breathe out God's mercies to others. Breathe in God's mercies. And breathe out God's mercies to others.

Gracious Spirit, you are as close to us as our very next breath. And so we pray that you would dwell within us and around us in these moments, that by your power you would quiet any voice within us by your own. That we might hear your word for us this day and that in hearing we might be called to lead lives of response. So may the words of my mouth and the meditations of all of our hearts be acceptable to you, God, our rock and our redeemer. Amen.

1 Peter, chapter 4, beginning in the 8th verse.

Above all, maintain constant love for one another, for love covers a multitude of sins. Be hospitable to one another without complaining. Like good stewards the manifold grace of God, serve one another with whatever gifts each of you has received.
The grass withers and the flower fades, but the word of our Lord endures forever. Amen.

So, Peter writing to the early church…he writes with specific instructions. I commend to you going back and just reading First Peter this afternoon. You have plenty of time to do that. Sit outside in the beauty of this autumn season, and read First Peter. What you'll find in that book is much encouragement to the early Christians. And I'm thinking it might be helpful for us to understand why it is that First Peter is so encouraging and instructive. First Peter is not addressing division within the church. It is addressing the health of the community overall. The Christians addressed in First Peter were experiencing suffering. But we shouldn't automatically imagine widespread organized state sponsored persecution. That's not what the letter addresses. Instead, First Peter describes a people, those trying to follow in the ways of Jesus,

maligned and insulted for their beliefs. They are misunderstood by their neighbors. They are pressured to conform to the established social expectations. They are experiencing strained relationships because of their new religious identity. This whole Christianity thing is still, we know as we read the New Testament, brand new. In 1 Peter 4:4, a verse that we didn't read this morning, the author describes outsiders being surprised that these so-called Christians no longer participate in the same activities they once did. As a consequence, they are being outcast. It's actually a really helpful glimpse into early Christianity. Much of their suffering appears to be really, without minimizing it, the ordinary social cost of belonging to a community whose values are different from the world around it. Okay. It's in the midst of this experience that Peter writes, and he encourages the people. He wants them to know that what they are doing is good and faithful. But he also wants to be particular in his instruction. In the lesson that we just read, he says to them, "*Above all, maintain constant love for one another, for love covers a multitude of sins. Be hospitable to one another without complaining. Like good stewards of the manifold grace of God, serve one another with whatever gifts each of you has received."* Peter encourages the early church with love, hospitality, and service. There's something key to each of these disciplines to being a faithful disciple of Jesus. Ground everything. maintain, he says, "*maintain constant love for one another, for love covers a multitude of sins.*" Everything begins with how we love one another and, by extension, our God. The way in which we love God is tied inextricably to the way that we love our neighbors. Peter wants to remind them of this. I love verse 9 though where he says to be hospitable to one another. It strikes me in verse 9 that Peter knows church people really, really well. Okay, he knows us really, really well. He says, "*Be hospitable to one another without complaining."* Okay, it is not simply enough to do the kind thing. If you turn around and complain about having to do the kind and hospitable thing, you are disconnected from what Christ desires for you. And then in verse 10, "*serve one another with whatever gifts each of you has received."* If you do that, you will be like good stewards or *Oikonomos*. You will be "*like good stewards of the manifold grace of God.*" What he wants them to know is that they have received a gift. It is the grace of Jesus Christ. And they are not to possess that gift but to steward that gift. This is really important. They have received forgiveness and renewal and new life. And that is not simply for them to possess. It is for them to share. That's what this Greek word means. It means to steward. That means to share something you do not own yourself. That's why the use of household manager becomes important too. What I want you to imagine is someone in charge of a beautiful home filled with all sorts of good things. And it is their job to make sure that everything is taken care of in that house, cared for, dusted, cleaned, that the doors are open so that others might come in and be welcomed around table together. It's their job to have food at that table that might nourish those who are hungry and cups filled with good things to drink so those who are thirsty might be nourished. That's their job. They don't own the house. They don't own the table. They don't own the cup. But they do own the responsibility to use what they have been given to bless the world.

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For the Christians to which Peter is writing, they have to wrestle with what it means to be a good steward of that which they have received. Peter seems to tell them that if they are to be good stewards, they have to serve one another with whatever gift they have received. Each of them uniquely equipped. Some with voices to sing in a choir. Some with the coordination to ring bells. Others with extra quarters in their pocket to share with kids. Others with the ability to remain patient when children are acting up a little bit. Others with the ability to preach. Others with the ability to pray. Each of them with different gifts. When used in service, they might call themselves good stewards, good *oikonomos* of the manifold grace of God.

I've been thinking a lot this week about what it means to be a good steward. And I was reminded of a person I was introduced to about 11 years ago now. His name is Richard Dawson. Not that Richard Dawson. This is a different Richard Dawson. This is a Richard Dawson who was an accomplished amateur golfer in England. I was first introduced to Mr. Dawson in 2015 as I was watching a press conference covering his retirement, but we'll come back to that. What's important for you to know is that from 1999 through 2015, Mr. Dawson served as secretary of the Royal and Ancient Golf Club of St. Andrews. Y'all know I love golf. I try not to talk about it too much up here, okay? But I need y'all to indulge me this morning. For 16 years, he served as the secretary of the Royal and Ancient Golf Club of St. Andrews. St. Andrews in Scotland is, for lack of a better phrase, the Jerusalem of golf or the Mecca of golf, right? It is, it is the place where all golfers want to pilgrimage at some point in their lives. Okay? It's a place where the game was born. And so, Secretary, the role that Mr. Dawson held for 16 years. That's actually the highest place of leadership within that club. Okay.

Doing a little research, Mr. Dawson led the modernization during his 16 years of leadership of one of golf's oldest institutions. He separated the historically private club from its efforts internationally to help govern the game and grow the game. He created something called the Royal and Ancient. There's a bit of reuse of words there, but it was a standalone organization to the actual golf club. He led and oversaw dramatic strengthening of the financial success of golf overall and of the Open Championship, what we call the British Open. The folks at Royal and Ancient carried the game to 138 different countries. They helped to secure, as y'all may remember, if you have any interest, the return of golf to the Olympics after 112 years of absence.

Mr. Dawson also oversaw the historic decision to admit women to the Royal and Ancient Golf Club for the first time in its 260 year history. We can all agree that was 260 years too late. And yet, in his leadership, the decision was made. So, it's not an exaggeration to say that he was, Mr. Dawson was one of the most influential figures in the history of the game. Back to the press conference, I was watching the BBC. I was watching news on the BBC when they flashed a coverage of this retirement press conference. Mr. Dawson was seated in a chair in the middle of a dais and a reporter asked, "What do you hope your legacy will be?" Dawson sat quietly for

only a breath and said, "We don't do legacies at the Royal and Ancient. To be honest, I was just saving a seat, and I hope I left it better than I found it." I was struck watching the news that day by the genuineness, the earnestness of his comments, of his humility. I actually believed him when he said it, that he was only saving the seat. It made me want to learn more about him. And I would discover that this was a pattern for him in his life. Redirecting credit to others. Redirecting credit that others would try to give to him. For each historic step forward in the organization that he led, he would credit the people. He would credit the organization. I wondered why it struck me so in late 2015, his words, his earnestness, his humility. I think, looking back, it was how countercultural it was and it is to see leaders take such a posture, to not only say it but to actually practice simply being stewards of what they have received, because nearest I can tell Mr. Dawson never moved a shovel of dirt to create a golf course. He certainly didn't imagine the game and grow it from nothing. and he did take over an organization that was about over 200 years old.

And in his words, he saved a seat and he hoped he left it better than he found it. It was refreshing to me to hear a leader understand himself as a steward. He seemed to receive it all as a gift. He believed it was his responsibility to care for it. He had a reverence for the gift. And I think that's important. It might be odd to you how often I think of Mr. Dawson's words. But they have really, quite literally, changed the way I understand my calling as a pastor and as a human walking around, right? His words quite literally changed how I understand what it means to be the head of staff of this place. I learned it and heard them in 15 and so it changed the way I pastored back in Georgia as well. The question of leadership shifted for me. It became very clear to me what that was supposed to look like. The question moved to this. How am I stewarding what God has entrusted to my care? So, vocationally, how am I stewarding this place and her people, caring for them, leading, encouraging, praying for? How am I stewarding the organization of this place? Literally, the physical building of this place. How am I a steward? How am I stewarding what God has entrusted to my care? Of course, y'all know as good Presbyterians, this isn't all entrusted to my care. It’s entrusted to our care, the people and the pews and the prayers and the service. It's made me ask myself over and over and over again, what will people say about me when they come and take the seat that I've been saving for them? It's not just changed my vocational life. It's literally changed the way I relate to my friends and my family and even make decisions in my personal life, relationships, or care of creation. What are people going to think when they take the seat that I've been saving for them? Will they imagine me to have been a good steward? Mr. Dawson's words maybe introduced me to the humility that comes with asking that question, but it was certainly the manifold grace of God that has made it most real in my life. And I wonder, I wonder how often you have thought about the people that God has entrusted to your care, your family, your friends, your partners. I wonder how often you've thought about the things that God has entrusted to your care. your home, your office, even this place. I wonder how often you have reflected on what it might mean to be a good and faithful *oikonomos* of what has been entrusted to your care, because I think that's

actually the invitation of this encouragement from Peter to the early church. It is to evaluate, to at the very least, reflect upon what it means to be good stewards of the manifold grace of God. This was meant, of course, to encourage the early church, and I think now it's meant to challenge us.

Are we loving fiercely and exhaustively in the name of Jesus? For to do so covers a multitude of sins, Peter says. "Are we being hospitable to one another?" And not just hospitable because we've been given the responsibility to do so, but are we doing it without complaining, without any other motivations? Are we serving one another with the gifts that we've been given?

We can't call ourselves good stewards if we're not.

I've spent a lot of time thinking about what it means that I'm one of the managers of a household that is not mine. Don't own anything in here. It changes the way I walk down the hallway and walk the grounds of this place. Changes the ways I show up in the hospital room. I wonder how it might change how you show up in this place. If you understand that it has been entrusted to your care, that you are here to be a steward, and even if you've been sitting in a pew where you're sitting this morning for five years or 10 years or 50 years, you're just saving a seat.

I wonder how it might shift how we serve one another in love if we started thinking less about us right now in this moment and a little bit more about the one that's going to come and take that seat 5 years, 10 years, 20 years, a hundred years from now. What do we need to do here and now so that they find themselves welcomed? So that they find themselves loved? So that they feel served and empowered to serve here in this place.

So, an invitation from First Peter and from your pastor. I wonder if you might spend some time this week reflecting on what God has entrusted to your care and how you are called to steward it here and now. It might be your voice. It might be your bodily presence. It might be a variety of gifts that I don't want to list out, but you know fully. I wonder if you might first reckon with all the gifts that have been entrusted to your care and that you might hear this morning an invitation to reflect upon your stewardship of those gifts. It is only when we utilize those gifts that we have received to the fullest extent, the most faithful extent, that we can call ourselves good stewards of the manifold grace of God. I wonder how your stewarding of your people and your things and your work might change.

I never intended to hear Mr. Dawson's words of humble stewardship, but I'm glad I did. And I'm also glad that we have these words from First Peter, short as they are, to encourage us this day.

Let's pray together. Gracious and loving one, you have gifted us with so much. Houses filled with all sorts of good things that we did not fill, gifts to care for and to love your people. You've

given us voices, and gosh, you've given us bank accounts. You've given us a love for creation that helps us to care for this place. You've given us special acumen in budgeting and in property and with children and young people. You've gifted us in all the possible ways we can be gifted. What we pray for, Lord, is that you might help us to more clearly understand how we're supposed to steward those gifts right now. It might be that we are right in line with what you want from us. Or it might be that you are calling us to even better stewardship in this time. Like the early church, we pray that you might ground us once again in your love. For we know like it does for us, it covers a multitude of sins. That you might ground us once again into your welcome without any complaint. That you might reveal to us how it is we're supposed to serve one another with what you've given us. We want to be good stewards of your manifold grace, oh God. So reshape our hearts and minds to be so this day and always.

In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, one God, Mother of us all. Amen.