I generally like preaching from the lectionary because in a certain sense it keeps you honest. By having texts on which you must preach, clergy cannot simply hunt through the Bible to find scriptures that support whatever it is that we really enjoy like Deuteronomy 14:7, which tells us not to eat camels, rabbits, and rock badgers. However, one problem with using the lectionary is that when stewardship season rolls around clergy have to do a fair amount of shoehorning in order to make whatever scripture shows up fit into the theme of sharing our time, talent and treasure. So we will do things like say the parable of the wise and foolish bridesmaids was Jesus’ way of saying that we need to make sure that the church has enough oil and by oil he means cold hard cash or shares of Berkshire Hathaway. Or when James and John asked Jesus if they could sit at his right and left hand their error was not presumptuousness but rather not first asking for a pledge card. So be forewarned there may be some sketchy exegesis coming your way where I am to bend one of today’s readings into a pretzel and say that it really all is about giving. But let me first frame the discussion about the topic of stewardship in terms of our theme for this year which is, “entrusted with things not our own.”

If you spend much time reading the dictionary you might have noticed that this theme sounds eerily close to Funk and Wagnall’s definition of a steward which is, “One who is entrusted with the management of property, finances, or other affairs not his own.” And I point this out not just as confession but rather to explore the idea of us being entrusted with things that come from those who came before us and that we are preserving them for those who will continue long after we depart this celestial ball. There is a story from the middle ages of some stonecutters who were working on a cathedral. If you remember a lot of the great churches in Europe took generations to build. Meaning that many who worked on them would never see the end result. A man passing by these stonecutters asked him what he was doing. The stonecutter replied that he was cutting stones. The man then went to another stonecutter and asked the same question and received roughly the same response. When he got to the third stonecutter and repeated the question the man replied that he was, “building for the glory of God.” It is this third man who truly understood what it was to be a steward. He had a very small part of the construction project and most likely would not see the completion of his labors, but understood that his part was a vital piece in building for God’s glory. And so now back to us.

St. John Chrysostom was founded on August 2nd, 1851 and is named for a guy who died in 407 in Comana Pontica (in what is now Turkey). Now as far as I know, even including some of those who attend the 7:30 service, none of us here have had lives that overlap with either of these two events. In other words this church was founded by people we did not know and named for a guy who could not find Wisconsin on a map (that is if they had decent maps back then). None of the founders of this place had any of us specifically in mind. But while not thinking of us specifically they were thinking of us generally. They were thinking that this town of Delafield needed a church and that it would need a church not just for their lifetime but for generations to come. A summer resident of Delafield by the name of John Francis Brine wrote these verses in 1894 in his poem entitled *Sunday Evening in Delafield*,

Now to the church with quiet tread

Through ground made sacred with their dead

Those left behind, those gone above

Unite to praise eternal love

Oh little church, belov’d, revered,

Oh little church, to all endeared

No lonely graves our lov’d ones fill

For thou dost watch and guard the hill

Those of us here and those who will come after are asked to watch and guard the hill. Now please don’t think when I say guard it means we are to keep people out, instead this guarding is meant to be a guarding of the souls of ourselves and of the community at large. The guarding we are called to do involves bringing others into the saving power of Christ’s one holy catholic and apostolic church and seeing this place raise up the next generation of Christians who will keep it for those who come after just as those who founded it did back in 1851.

A number of years ago I was speaking with someone of a more evangelical background about churches closing. He was fairly cavalier about it and said that when God is finished with a place you simply move on to the next one. His view of the church was sort of like most of our views of our water heater, every ten years or so the old one is going to wear out and so you simply go and get a new one. As you might suspect I did not agree and said that the failure of churches is not the will of God but is rather a sad commentary on the failure of humanity to protect the holy and sacred. It’s always nice to blame God for our failures, but think of the honor and privilege that we have to serve in the line of people who have come before. It was once said that the difference between tradition and traditionalism is that tradition is the living faith of the dead whereas traditionalism is the dead faith of the living. We are united to the past through the tradition, through that living faith of the dead and our job is to continue that faithful string. For us to leave this play enlivened with our faith so that it is here for generations to come. Our reading from Job today says this, “O that my words were written down! O that they were inscribed in a book! O that with an iron pen and with lead they were engraved on a rock forever! For I know that my Redeemer lives, and that at the last he will stand upon the earth." This place is meant to be the words that are engraved on a rock so that not just us but those who come will know that their redeemer lives.

And of course now to the part that we like to pretend doesn’t matter, the finances. But of course this does matter. One of Fr. Peay’s favorite stories concerns a monk who said, “I don’t care about your mission statement show me your budget and then I will know what you really believe.” We are not financial Gnostics. We cannot pretend that we can do whatever we want with our money and then say we are pure and good and whole. Our money is where we show our priorities and so in this season of Stewardship we need to ask if our personal budget will tell a story of commitment to this place and its continuing mission of standing guard for God’s Kingdom or will it tell another, less flattering story.

Let me end with a story about what this place is called to be. In Jerusalem this past weekend there was a reunion between a ninety-two-year-old Greek woman named Melpomeni Dina and the Jewish siblings she hid from the Nazis during the Second World War. Mrs Dina and her two sisters kept the Mordechai family in the attic of an abandoned Turkish mosque before moving them to their home in northern Greece. At the ceremony, she also met around 40 of the family’s descendants, who owe their very existence to her bravery. Sarah Yanai, the oldest of siblings who were given refuge, said this, "We were hidden in her house. She saved all my family. You can't imagine how dangerous it was for her, for her family, to keep us all. What can I say? Look at all these around us. We are now a very large and happy family and it is all thanks to them saving us."

Will we be like Melpomeni Dina and preserve and grow this place so that there will be many large and happy families that come after. People who will owe their salvation to our vision of being the guardian on the hill striving to bring this community into a relationship with the holy so that we all may be God’s both now and forevermore.