Anglican-Lutheran Society Conference Hamburg

11th-15th September, 2026

'A Changing Church in an Age of Migration'

John 15 9-17 - Remaining good Stewards in the House of God

The sermon preached by The Rev Fredrik Ulseth
at our Closing Eucharist

Introduction
Helge Brattgård (d. 2007), Swedish bishop in Skara Diocese, visited a retreat for clergy in Oslo diocese, I think in 1985, when I was a rather young curate at that time. He had, 20 years earlier (1963/64), written a book, «God´s Stewards» (*goda förvaltare*), on behalf of the Lutheran World Federation. Here he unfolds *the stewardship theology*, originating from Nordic emigrants in Northern America in the late 1800ies. He profoundly inspired me through his brilliant teaching on The Church, *on all levels*, as ***«oikos»,*** those serving there as ***«oikonomoi»,*** building up, ***«oikodomeo»*** the house/household through a good ***«oikonomia».*** This is certainly not City of London language! ***The steward´s foremost task is providing the household in due time with what they need.*** This Stewardship theology has been in my pastoral spinal cord since that retreat!

The conference
During these important conference days we have encountered the complex migration issue, discussed it and met the challenge not only from 300 million migrants and 117 million fugitives in the world, but from this vast number of ***single human beings***, one by one knocking on our doors. ***This is for me, absolutely, a question about how we live and act as God´s stewards in his House. Are we stewards opening the doors of our house, welcoming people inside and providing them what they need in due time?***

When I was working on this sermon, our (late) King Harald V passed away. And we followed his very solemn funeral in Oslo last Wednesday. He was a Sovereign opening the doors in our society, making Norway, nor greater, ***but wider***; convincing us to give space for those who knocked on our door in despair and deepest need. In several, quite famous and much appreciated speeches, and through his uncountable visits around the entire Norway, he made our citizens of every origin, colour, faith, age, profession etc. feel valuable and included. His attitude made so many, not at least immigrants, feel they had a legitimate place in society.

Is there a connection between King Harald´s legacy to my nation - ***Embracing people, most of all the most vulnerable ones,*** the stewardship theology - and Jesus´ beautiful figurative words when he is painting for us the vine and it´s fruits in John 15?

The simple answer is YES - *the branches and their organic growing on the vine,* ***and from that their fruits.*** Our natural spinal cord reflex to this is *at once asking for the fruits and their impact in Church and society.* We want as quickly as possible to become those making a difference! Seeing results! Agree?

But Jesus´ picture requires us to take a step or two backwards. Because ***Jesus makes us look behind and before the fruits.*** When he is painting the vine for us, ***he paints a picture of the only way we can become and remain good stewards in the house of God. He shows us the inner side, the nucleus, of stewardship.***

With a remarkable intensity, close to a mystic language, he defines himself, in his last "*Ego eimi*"-saying, as the True Vine, and we are the fruit-bearing branches on that vine. '*I am the Vine, you are the branches. Those who* ***abide in me*** *and I in them bear much fruit,* ***because apart from me you can do nothing.'***

And then some verses later: ***'Abide in my love.'*** That is keeping his commandments. ***And***, in the next moment (our text): '***This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.'*** «Love» is in The Gospel of John ***Jesus´ definition of being a disciple, of living the Christian life, a stewardship life.***

But again: This Love must be nourished by the day-by-day organic growth every branch lives on the vine. ***Our abiding in "The loving vine" is the absolute condition for every kind of stewardship in the house of God.*** And so, by the power of the Holy Spirit, we will bear fruits according to his promises! ***How can we, day by day, live this abiding life?***

Again, in this Last Discourse Jesus tells us straight forwardly: (v.7) '*If you abide in me and my words abide in you, ask for whatever you want, and it will be done for you.'*

*Precisely! It's about living ***in*** the Scripture; living ***with*** the Scripture. I almost envy you, good Anglican friends, your life with the Morning- and Evening prayer; Scripture and prayer within the same frame. No doubt that is formative – for mind and action.

*In a similar way: **Living the Holy Communion; *living a life,*** not only the celebrational moments like this morning, but living every moment with the truth and impact from the Liturgy´s invitation to the table: *Draw near with faith. Receive the body of our Lord Jesus Christ which he gave for you, and his blood which he shed for you. Eat and drink in remembrance that he died for you, and feed on him in your hearts by faith with thanksgiving.*

Through this Scripture- and Holy Communion life, we also find ourselves addressed as ***friends of Christ. The chosen ones; appointed to go and bear fruits. Only as fruit-bearers we can live and serve as stewards in and for God´s household. I could also define this as a diaconal life.***

Some of these fruits obviously must be found in the dialogue we have with authorities and politicians on behalf of the voiceless ones. This is the challenging reality and social context our "*oikos*" is facing. A task for our leaders primarily?

But "inside" the *oikos*, we also have important work to do in the ever-ongoing *oikodomeo*-project. One core point in a central Church of Norway document on "Migration, Asylum-politics and Solidarity", is ***hospitality***; an issue we have met several times during these days together.

This demands, also locally, making choices and standing up for people in social/political environments that from time to time are rather hostile. But then, being a steward, standing in an open doorway, having the grace of telling the newcomer: "Come! You are among friends; you are a friend of Christ. Here in our House, oikos, you have a home. You are a branch finding your way into growing on our local vine."

Then the steward happens to witness the miracle of grafting (we know that red and blue grapes can grow on the same vine) when a branch finds its place to grow. In such graceful moments a steward will experience the love from Christ fulfilled in another human being.

After these important conference days in Hamburg I will, among lots of strong impressions and warm friendship, take back home with me the Vision of The Vine, Christ visible in the world through his Church, his *oikos*, being more divers, colourful, stronger and bold when opening the doors of this house for new people; ***inviting them to abide in Christ and his love.*** And look! By the power of the Holy Spirit the Vine will bear fruits on its old and new branches, locally, nationally, ecumenically – fruits we never could imagine!

Dear friends! Share this vision with me!

Glory to the Father, and to the Son and to the Holy Ghost, as it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.