

SERMON - Bigger Barns, Luke 12:16-21, November 17, 2019

Why are we here? Why were we born, and what is the purpose of our life? I hope that all of you will answer that we are here to live a Christian life, blameless and peaceful, so that we can give a good account before the awesome judgement seat of Christ. Does that sound familiar? It should, because we all pray it at every Divine Liturgy.

Our Savior spoke many parables in order to teach us how to be Christians and how to fulfill the purpose of our lives: the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, the parable of the talents, the parable of the unjust steward, and even today's parable about the rich man who decides to build bigger barns. Does anyone see a common thread or connecting message in all of these parables? We are all stewards on this earth. Nothing really belongs to us, everything belongs to God. God entrusts us with life itself and with His precious earth. Even our money and possessions do not really belong to us, because they will all be left behind when we leave this earth. In addition, God entrusts each of us with individual talents and abilities. We can say that our talents are gifts from God. The question is, are we good stewards or bad stewards? What we do with the time, treasure and talents that God has made us stewards over in this life has a huge impact on the next. If we have money and hoard our money, it will not go well for us in the next life. Likewise, if we hoard our abilities, our talents, our influence, our time, our listening ear, our helpful hand, our compassionate tears, it will also not go well for us in the next life. "Giving," as St. Paul says, "is not measured by what you don't have, but by what you have" (2 Cor. 8:12). I've been a priest for 36 years, and I only found out at the Diocesan Assembly that I recently attended what my job is. My job is to try to get all of you to offer your talents and gifts to God, which means in service to the Church and to your fellow man. Here are some statistics:

1. 47% of adults who were raised in the Orthodox Church have left the Church.
2. Millennials (aged 18-29) are almost 2.3 times more likely than their adult parents to be unaffiliated with the Church.
3. Only 26% of all Orthodox adherents attend church on a regular weekly basis.
4. People are giving a lower percentage of income to churches in the 2000's than they did either during the Great Depression or the 1920's.
5. 37% of church goers give \$0 to the church.
6. Only 32% of charitable contributions were given to religious causes
7. The average Evangelical Protestant gives \$1,165 a year to the church
8. The average Greek Orthodox Archdiocese parishioner gives \$218 a year to the church
9. Baptisms and weddings are steadily declining in the Orthodox Church
10. Funerals are steadily increasing in the Orthodox Church
11. The religious groups with the most growth are the Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses, Assemblies of God, and Seventh Day Adventists
12. Church dependence upon fund raisers, raffles and festivals is increasing

The Didache is one of the oldest Christian documents that we still have. It pre-dates the New Testament. Didache means "The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles." In the Didache it says:

"Every first-fruit, therefore, of the products of wine-press and threshing-floor, of oxen and of sheep, you shall take and give to the prophets, for they are your high priests. But if you have not a prophet, give it to the poor. If you make a batch of dough, take the first-fruit and give according to the commandment. So also when you open a jar of wine or of oil, take the first-fruit and give it to the prophets; and of money (silver) and clothing and every possession, take the first-fruit, as it may seem good to you, and give according to the commandment."

Can we be better stewards? Stewardship is what a person does after saying "I believe" as proof of that belief. Do we offer our first-fruits of time, treasure and talents or do we give what's left over? Think about what the biggest stewardship challenges we face here in our parish. Rick Warren says that leaders of a Church will either be risk takers, caretakers, or undertakers. The worst thing we can say is "we've always done it that way." I have great respect for our fathers and mothers and the great task they had many years ago, but sometimes what worked in 1935 doesn't work any more in 2019. Can you think of any effective organization that is using the same operational structure it used 65 or more years ago? We have to be flexible and willing to change, accept new ideas and ways of doing things, not just for the sake of change, but when change is necessary, otherwise instead of being caretakers we will be undertakers. We must be willing to take risks. Do you wish to see change in the world? *You* must be the change that you wish to see in the world. This is only the first step in creating regular processes to buy in to a common vision and actively participate in life changing ministries of growth. We can grow or we can die. We can learn more about stewardship or we can just go on with business as usual. We have the power and ability. It is our choice. Amen.