



THE PASTOR'S PEN

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The Lesson of the Farmer

Lent is over and Eastertide has begun! We are now celebrating the power of the resurrection and all that it means for the Church and for humanity. During the month of March we saw five people come forward and make First Christian their church home and place of service. We have welcomed them and I hope that they are feeling the genuine love of God and the fellowship that we have here in our congregation. I am very pleased and thankful for each new person that come inside and worships with us, yet I have to wonder. I wonder why we are not seeing more folks from our community worshiping and serving here with us at First Christian? Perhaps the parable of the farmer might offer us some insight into this matter.

The story is told about an old farmer who had three sons. One day, as the farmer was coming downstairs for dinner, he overheard the three boys arguing about the best way to make money and prepare for the future. Now while the old man was pleased to hear the boys talking about plans for the future, he was not so happy with them once they began to express their own ideas and disregard all that he had spent a lifetime teaching them.

The first son said that speculation in the stock market was the way to go. You invest your money, reinvest the profits and the wait for it to grow and prosper over the next twenty or thirty years until you have enough for all of your needs. The second son disagreed and said that gambling was the quickest way to make a fortune. Cards, dice and sporting events could let you turn \$100 into \$10,000 overnight. With a good run of luck, a man could make a huge fortune in just a few short months. The third son shook his head and laughed saying that both of the older brothers were wrong. He added that the best way to make money was to become an inventor. He said all one needs to do is just invent a new product, patent it and then sell several million items to a gullible public. Once you did that, you could be on easy street for the rest of your life.

As the brothers argued, the father came in and sat down at the table. The boys quickly hushed and began to eat. After a few moments passed, that seemed like an eternity to the boys, the old farmer spoke up and addressed the subject that they had been arguing over that evening. He said to them that sitting around talking about speculating, gambling and trying to dupe people into buying something they don't need are only empty words and empty promises.

It was just like going out into the field and sitting on a pile of rocks with a bucket between your legs waiting for the old cow to back up to be milked. It might happen, but you could never depend on it taking place. No, he reminded them, the only way to really prepare for a sure future, was to know what needed to be done (as he had taught them), work hard at it (as he had showed them) and be as ready as you could be for the unexpected (as he always was). After that, the old man finished his meal and went out to the barn to finish up his day's work. The boys at this time, still sitting there around the table, continued their arguments with each other. Meanwhile their chores went undone; the farm lost out on their labor and whatever profit they might have made that day.

So what does this parable have to do with the Church of today? Today we have a lot of folks arguing over the needs of the Church. They complain about the lack of young people and push their own agendas of what they want to do and what they are comfortable with; while giving their ideas about what they think the purpose of the Church is in the twenty-first century. Quite often we forget that we have a heavenly Father who has told us the purpose of the Church and has shown us what is needed to make a growing, healthy, vibrant congregation in any culture or at any age. Just like with the old farmer and his sons, God's children are often found ignoring their chores, sitting around His table arguing over how they think a better way needs to be found that is quicker, easier and does not take as much time and effort as has been needed in the past. Now I am not saying that there is no room for modernization in how we do things. What I am saying is that we do not need to reinvent the Church based on what we may guess is important to people today and ignore the fact that basic humanity and its needs have not really changed in the past 5,000 years. The God who created us and knows us has already shown us what people need and how we are to provide for those needs.

Humanity still needs the basics of God's word and work: which is to reach out to individuals meeting them where they are and to provide them with the opportunity to have a personal relationship with their Creator. That need and that work have never changed and the Church has been called upon to help meet these goals in every age and every culture. Evangelism is still a one-on-one business. Loving your neighbor as yourself is still an individual act. Service to God and being a disciple of Christ are still individual responsibilities. No matter if we build a bigger building, remodel what already exists, add a dozen new programs and change around our service times; if we do not go out and tell people about it, they will never know and never have the chance to respond. If we do not let them know of their need for Jesus Christ and what He can do for them, there will be very few if any new people showing up at our door and of those who do show up, few will stay. People all want the same thing: to be cared for and to find a purpose for living. The Church offers both, but until the folks in our community see and hear it for real, from us personally, outside of our four walls; then like the old farmer implied, our milk bucket will probably not be very full any time soon. The bottom line is this: are we ready to follow what we have already been taught about the work the Church needs to do, or are we just going to sit around the table and talk?

See you in the field,

James